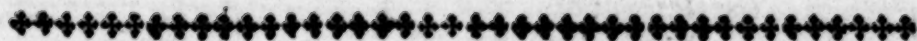


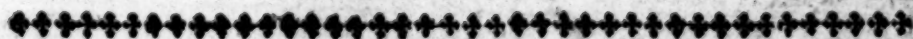
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ESSAYS and SERMONS,

O N

Doctrinal and Practical Subjects.



ESSAYS and SERMONS

ON

Doctrinal and Practical Subjects

**E S S A Y S
A N D
S E R M O N S,
O N
Doctrinal and Practical Subjects.**

By the late REVEREND
Mr THOMAS WALKER,
Minister of the Gospel at DUNDONALD,
And Author of the Vindication of the Discipline and
Constitutions of the Church of Scotland.

I will not leave you comfortless. JOHN, xiv. 18.

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ESSAYS AND SERMONS ON Doctrinal and Practical Subjects

By the late REVEREND
MR. THOMAS WALKER,
Minister of the Gospel at Dunbar,
And Author of the Vindication of the Dismissal and
Excommunications of the Church of Scotland.

LONDON: Printed by J. DODD, in Pall-mall.



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Newcastle.

THE following Discourses are not meant to attract public applause, but to promote public edification.—This was the object at which their Author, through the course of a life that does honour to human nature, uniformly pointed his endeavours: and the Editors have no other view but to follow out his wishes for the good of mankind, by offering to their perusal these Essays, which he drew up for his own improvement, or for the instruction of his charge. Were we to mention the persons who selected them from his other manuscripts, their names would soon give importance to the volume, and widen its circulation: But it is only intrinsic merit that could prompt them to approve; and it is to be hoped that the intrinsic merit, which has drawn their approbation, will not be overlooked by the public eye.

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ESSAYS.

ESSAY I.

Of Original Sin.

AS the prejudices which infidels have against the Christian religion do not seem to arise so much from the scantiness of the evidence as from the nature of its doctrines, which must, and always will be disagreeable to the proud hearts of unhumbled sinners; so the mischief they have done, and the success they have had, consists rather in propagating that partial infidelity which we call heresy, i. e. a rejecting the particular doctrines of Christianity, and filling the minds of Christians themselves with objections against what the apostles have taught, than in overthrowing their authority in the general. With a view, however, to reconcile this general authority of the inspired writers with the rejection of some of the leading principles of Christianity, all the arts of criticism have been applied to the words of scripture; and to such a degree have they been tortured, that by means of the same sort of racking and distorting, any words may be made to mean any thing; which must in the issue have a fatal effect on the honour due to the word of God, as if it was a mere nose of wax, capable of being moulded into any shape the manufacturer pleases.

Yet these objections themselves are in reality a confirmation of the very truths they are opposed to, as being an evidence of the unsubmissive pride of our cor-

rupt natures, a sort of rebellion against the authority, the justice, and even the mercy of God, and a standing to our own vindication, where perfect and immaculate purity cannot but condemn us; excusing, palliating, and throwing from ourselves upon God the blame of what is truly abomination in his sight, and claiming that salvation as due to us in justice, which a humbling sense of our own unjustifiable depravity would ascribe to the most astonishing grace when bestowed upon any that was ever born of a woman.

Besides the slight sense we are apt to have of the excessive evil there is in every disconformity of a soul to the law of God, which, as it is quickest and liveliest in immaculate purity, so it is blunted and deadened in every inferior intelligence, exactly in proportion to its moral depravity, and must therefore disqualify it to judge of those truths that are conformable to the unerring standard; besides this, another great source of errors in religion is wrong notions of God, whom we are too apt to conceive as being like to ourselves. And therefore it may not perhaps be improper here to be reminded,

That such is the inconceivable supereminence of the divine nature, such his incomprehensible excellency, whether in respect of his natural or moral perfections, that it must be allowed there is no sort of comparison, no sort of proportion, between God and us, or indeed any created being; all of whom were spoke into existence by a word of his power, and may as easily be spoken out of it whenever he pleases. “Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance. All nations before him are as nothing, and are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity *.” “When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him †?”

This I do not insist upon, as if the inconsiderable meanness of any creature in comparison to God were

* Is. xl. 15. 17.

† Ps. viii. 3. 4.

sufficient to vindicate any real injustice done to them, (this the infinite perfection of his own nature must ever render him incapable of), but only to show, that our demands upon him cannot bear a comparison with those which we have upon one another. Let our ideas of justice, goodness, &c. be the same when applied to God as when they are applied to ourselves; but then justice requires, in order to a fair comparison of different actions, that all the circumstances be exactly parallel. When a man permits other men to fall into misery which it was in his power to prevent, such a behaviour must be highly disapproveable; because these men are not only of the same rank, of the same species, with himself, endued by the bounty of their Creator with the same faculties, and raised by the love of their Redeemer to the same hopes, but because in that very instance (no higher moral obligation being supposed that might excuse him) he disobeys the command of their common Lord, who has required him to do them all manner of good offices. But if this man should inflict the same degree of pain upon an ox or a sheep, especially if it were with a view to promote the good of mankind, would any body consider such an action in the same light? Carry on the gradation, and suppose it but a fly or a worm that is trampled upon, or whose very life is extinguished, and try whether in a moral balance the weight of the injury would not be proportionably diminished. Now, if the mere excellency of one creature above another makes such a difference in the judgement we pass upon the same usage of the one and of the other, what effect must this consideration have when applied to the conduct of God towards his creatures? Some proportion there is between a worm and a man; but between men and the supreme being there is no proportion at all.

If to this difference, as to mere supereminence and excellency of nature, we add, that all mankind are the creatures of his power, who out of nothing were formed into being by the sovereign will of the great Creator, how absolute must be his right to dispose of them as he pleases? How uncontrollable his sovereignty over all his creatures, in comparison with any shadow of it that

can be supposed to be in one creature over another? There is no foundation of a right among men, or even angels, over their fellow-creatures, that can be so much as compared to this.

Yet there is another thing that even among men would make no small difference in passing a judgement upon their treatment of one another, namely, an office of government. Though a good natured man, in a private capacity, would be shocked at the very thoughts of flaying his neighbour's back to the bone by repeated stripes; yet, if he were a good magistrate, he may often find it necessary to order a severe whipping in a perfect consistency with an unblemished character: or if a commander of an army, he might be obliged to assign a post even to an innocent man, where he would not only be exposed to great labour and hardship, but to painful, perhaps fatal wounds by bullets, swords, and other instruments of destruction, and that without so much as giving a reason for what he does. But what power or right of government can be compared with his, "who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords *;" "the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God †;" "whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation? And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What dost thou ‡?" "I," says he himself, "am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God besides me. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things. Wo unto him that striveth with his maker: let the potsherd strive with the potsherd of the earth: shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands ||?" "For who in the heaven can be compared unto the Lord? who among the sons of the mighty can be likened unto the Lord **?"

* 1 Tim. vi. 15.

|| Is. xlv. 5. 7. 9.

† 1 Tim. i. 17.

** Ps. lxxxix. 6.

‡ Dan. iv. 34 35.

I shall only mention one instance more, wherein our conceptions of God, as being like ourselves, may lead us into mistakes, and occasion objections against his conduct. God, as he is without body or parts, so he is without passions. He is not of like passions with us *. The ever-blessed God, who possesses an eternal, essential, and undisturbed happiness and tranquillity, though he can act upon every thing, yet he cannot be acted upon by any thing, and consequently must be entirely free from those affections which we very properly call feelings, and which he has endued us with as a sort of supplement to our reason, which is very defective, and insufficient of itself to prompt us to right action; whereas perfect wisdom, all-comprehensive and unerring, is the unaided spring of action in the Deity. The Shaftesburians, however, placing the very nature of virtue, not in the supreme government of our reason over all the animal feelings, all the inferior affections or inclinations, which in our original constitution do only possess the rank of the ruled, not the rulers, but in the indulgence or gratification of such of these affections as are of the benevolent kind, do likewise, in consequence, ascribe such affections to God himself. Now there is nothing apter to mislead us in passing a judgement on the divine conduct: for these affections, as they are in us, being a sort of tender and sympathetic feeling of the misery of our fellow-creatures, whereby we are shocked at the painful idea, is really a weakness, which, without the conduct of reason, could not but lead us into the grossest errors. And accordingly we may often have observed some, especially of the weaker and tenderer sex, where these feelings have been too strong for their reason, thereby disqualified in a great measure for the right government of a small society.

It is a notorious and undeniable fact, that there is a great deal of misery in the world; and it is one of the essential truths of religion, that many rational creatures will be very miserable for ever. Yet the happiness of the supreme being cannot be in the least disturbed thereby. God must needs have a perpetual pleasure and sa-

* Acts, xiv. 15.; James, v. 17.

tisfaction in all his own actions, because they are all fit and right; and however he may regard the immoral actions of his creatures with the utmost disapprobation, yet the punishment thereof, being an action of his own, proceeding from infallible wisdom, must ever be regarded with the highest delight and complacency. Whereas, if benevolent affections were the true spring of action in the Deity, there never could have been any such thing as misery in the world, as it was entirely in his power to communicate existence or not to such creatures as he could not but foresee would deserve it.

Lord Shaftesbury, with all his partisans, do very consistently recommend private friendship and the love of one's country, i. e. in reality, a partial and irrational affection, as a high pitch of virtue; for the universal rational charity of Christianity is not suitable it seems to their idea of the truth. Accordingly, may we not observe those of this character, even in spite of their unmeaning phrase, "the good of the whole," unanimously concur in supporting a friend, right or wrong, *per fas et nefas*; chusing rather that all good discipline should be thrown up, than that their sympathetic feelings should be crossed or thwarted by the infliction of a proper censure, so necessary in a well-governed society? driving on the particular settlement of a friend, where it can serve no other purpose but his personal convenience, to the ruin of religion; nay, and vindicating such a conduct, and accusing those who oppose such measures as wanting the amiable feelings of humanity? If the conduct of the supreme being is to be judged by such rules, what wonder if it be disapproved?

If all-comprehensive wisdom, and not any thing like our weak feelings, be the true spring of action in the Deity, there can be no wonder in our inability to judge of his conduct, or to account satisfactorily for the dispensations of his providence; because we are so far from having an adequate view of all the circumstances, upon which a right judgement must be founded, that it is impossible for us, in this present state at least, to come to an obscure and indistinct knowledge of above a very few of them. It is very probable that the present system of the human race stands connected in the divine plan,

not only with other systems that are coexistent, (as it is certain it has a connection both with angels and devils), but possibly with others that are past or to come. Of all which, as we have not the least glimmering knowledge, so how little do we know of innumerable circumstances even of the present system whereof we are members ! How ignorant are we of the manner of the generation of one man from another ? How ignorant of the state of mind in children ? Though we all passed through the state of infancy, yet which of us can pretend to recollect the ideas we then had, the degree of activity in our volitions, &c. ? What intolerable presumption then must there be in pretending to pass a judgement upon a whole great chain, whereof we scarcely and obscurely perceive but one or two links, unfurnished as we are either with the necessary lights, or with equal capacities for so high an undertaking ?

I have insisted the more on these general considerations, because, as the chief objection against what we may say at least the scripture seems to assert of original sin, and God's treatment of his fallen creatures, is taken from the alledged injustice of it ; so this is a manner of reasoning which is obviously discouraged in the scripture, and constantly represented as the highest degree of presumption. This very objection is frequently started in the scripture ; but it is usually treated as extremely unbecoming that state of ignorance and inferiority, of which we ought to retain a deeper sense, and utterly inconsistent with that profound and implicit submission which the infinite grandeur and adorable excellency of the supreme being challenges from such mean and contemptible creatures as we are.

The book of Job seems to have been designed upon this very plan, and with this precise view. It pleased God to permit Satan to inflict the most grievous calamities and pains upon one who had not only been guilty of no extraordinary provocation to draw upon himself such unusual, such visible, and striking sufferings, but who is represented as a man of most singular and distinguished virtue, and excelling most men in the perfection of his character. This produced a solemn and keen debate between him and his friends. They insisted, that he

must certainly have been a vile notorious hypocrite, as the contrary supposition could not, in their apprehension, be reconciled with the justice of God. He, on the other hand, protested in the most earnest manner, and insisted upon the sincerity and uprightness of his heart as well as life; not without dropping, now and then, insinuations and reflections, as if he was really staggered at the appearance of injustice there seemed to be in the divine conduct towards him. At length God himself appears, and that in a most awful manner, to give the final decision of this difficult and warmly-litigated question. But how does he decide it? By explaining to them the reasons of his conduct, and clearing up the justice of it to the satisfaction of their understandings. Does he so much as touch at the arguments which might have been raised upon Job's own concessions? Does he insist upon the imperfection of his holiness, and the degree of sinfulness, which he could not deny? Does he attempt to balance his present sufferings with his former prosperity, and the happiness that was yet in reserve for him? By no means. This is very wide of the course he chuses to take. Instead of opening up, and making them sensible of the grounds of his procedure, instead of pleading his cause before such incompetent judges, he lets them know how infinitely far he was above so debasing a trial. He sets before them his adorable excellency, his infinite power and wisdom, and silences them at once with a confounding revelation of his ineffable grandeur and majesty; and thus convinces them of the presumptuous folly in such puny short-sighted worms to judge his measures, or to refuse an implicit approbation of his wisdom and justice in every instance; till at length he brought down the proud spirit of Job to confess, "I have uttered that I understood not, things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes *." Nowhere is the true dignity of the supreme being maintained in so awful a manner as in the holy scripture.

* Job, xlii. 3 5. 6.

With the same view it seems to be, that Abraham's ready obedience in sacrificing his only son Isaac to the command of God, was recorded and celebrated with the highest approbation. Abraham no doubt could have started abundance of objections against the morality of the action, and most parents I dare say would have done it; but that every consideration yielded to his implicit submission to the declared will of God: and the sense he had of his absolute sovereignty in the disposal of all his creatures, was so highly pleasing to God, that nothing could be more so.

But, not to insist on some other examples of the same nature, let us only observe the manner in which the Apostle Paul repels the objections that are apt to occur against his doctrine of election and reprobation, in the 9th chapter of the Romans. It is not my present business to discuss the question, What it is that the apostle speaks of election to? whether of individuals to salvation, or only of nations to the means of it? Let it be to the means of it. The apostle, if we consult himself, allows that this is what the salvation of individuals depended upon: "What then?" says he, "Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded: according as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber," &c. And again, "Through their fall *salvation* is come unto the Gentiles *." But whatever his doctrine be, it seems it was a doctrine that lay obnoxious to an objection, as if God did not deal equally with men, or give them the same opportunities and means of salvation. "What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God?" Does the apostle pretend that this objection must have arisen from some mistake of what it was that he taught? and that his doctrine was such as afforded no occasion for it at all? Far from it. He rejects indeed the imputation, the presumptuous imputation, of injustice to God, with abhorrence; but this he does by asserting his absolute right of sovereignty in disposing of the necessary means of salvation, and consequently of salvation itself: "God

* Rom. xi. 7. 8. 11.

“ forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on
 “ whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion
 “ on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not
 “ of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of
 “ God that sheweth mercy.” Nay, he supposes the ob-
 jection farther urged : “ Thou wilt say then unto me,
 “ Why doth he yet find fault ? For who hath resisted
 “ his will ? ” And how does he answer it ? Only by
 rebuking the fauciness of it, and insisting on the uncon-
 troulable right of the supreme being to dispose of his
 free favours as he pleases, without being obliged to give
 us a reason for bestowing upon some only what he was
 not obliged to bestow upon any : “ Nay but, O man,
 “ who art thou that repliest against God ? shall the thing
 “ formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou
 “ made me thus ? ” And he concludes the whole sub-
 ject of the rejection of the Jews, and calling of the Gen-
 tiles, with a declaration, that the reasons of the divine
 conduct are altogether inscrutable by us, who may rest
 assured of the wisdom thereof, how far soever beyond
 the reach of our comprehension : “ O the depth of
 “ the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of
 “ God ! how unsearchable are his judgements, and
 “ his ways past finding out ! For who hath known the
 “ mind of the Lord, or who hath been his counsel-
 “ lor * ? ”

Although these and such like considerations may just-
 ly deter us even from pretending to vindicate, far more
 to object against the dispensations of divine Providence,
 and though our inability to account for what is so far a-
 bove our capacity, is really no just objection thereto;
 and although it must be acknowledged, with Augustine,
 “ *Peccato originali nihil ad prædicandum notius, nihil*
 “ *ad intelligendum secretius;*” yet without diving be-
 yond our depth, it may perhaps be of some use to make
 the following observations.

1. That there is no comparison between moral evil,
 or the evil of sin, and physical evil, or the evil of suf-
 fering, must be obvious to every one who reflects, that
 God himself is often the author of the last, having an

* Rom. xi. 33. 34.

active hand in the infliction of pain or misery upon his creatures; whereas he is so far from ever being the author of sin, that he is of purer eyes than to look upon it without detestation.

2. There seems to be one circumstance, perhaps not very usually attended to, affecting the nature of sin, namely, that all the faculties of the agent who has once given admission to it, not only his inferior appetites, but his will, and even understanding, is thereby infected with so virulent a poison, that it becomes utterly impossible (I mean morally, not physically impossible) to recover the good disposition which he has thereby lost. The universal effect of every rebellious volition in a creature against his maker, and the natural operation thereof, is, to involve him deeper and deeper in this fatal evil. The inclination to it is strengthened by every repeated act, and the habit, every moment it continues, by striking deeper and firmer roots, grows more invincible, at the same time that the rational powers are wasted and weakened; insomuch that, without a supernatural interposition of the supreme being, to rectify or restrain the bad disposition, instead of ever growing better, it is the natural tendency of sin to grow worse and worse.

There are only two species of sinners within the compass of our knowledge, men and devils. Of all the numberless legions of devils, there is not a single instance of any of them returning, or attempting to return, to their allegiance. And as for men, among whom alone any instance of this sort can be produced, we know that it requires an exertion of almighty power like to that which at first produced their existence out of nothing.

3. Absolutely perfect and immaculate purity seems to be peculiar to God alone. And such is the essential deficiency and imbecility of creatures, that, if left entirely to the original powers of their nature, it is probable they would not always continue in that state of holiness and happiness in which every rational creature comes out of the hands of its maker, but would succumb under temptations they might be exposed to. Holiness is an attribute of such excellency that it is the

prerogative of the self-existent being alone to possess it essentially and unchangeably. Even the angels who have had the happiness to keep their first estate, owe their confirmation in it to the free grace and election of God; for they are expressly called by the Apostle Paul, "the elect angels *." As for their own natural powers, Eliphaz was instructed how insufficient they were, when a supernatural voice said, "Shall mortal man be more just than God? shall a man be more pure than his maker? Behold, he put no trust in his servants, and his angels he charged with folly †." And again, "Behold, he putteth no trust in his saints; yea, the heavens are not clean in his sight ‡." And the actual fall, not only of Adam in paradise, but of Satan and his angels in heaven, is an evidence that no degree of excellency, no natural powers, no favourable situation, is proof against that weakness that is essential to the creature.

4. Yet there is nothing that rational creatures seem less inclinable to be apprehensive of, or indeed more averse from admitting. The very endowments which their creator is pleased bountifully to bestow upon them, are apt to feed that vanity which self-love so easily degenerates into; and the higher the powers that are conferred upon them, so much the solidier ground do they seem to have, upon which to build a sort of self-sufficiency, and to affect an independency upon the fountain of every good and perfect gift. This is plainly hinted by the Apostle Paul || to have been the ruin of the devil; and there can be little doubt that our first parents did split upon the same rock. Nothing, however, can be more contrary to the real nature of things, no error of more importance, or what it is of higher consequence that rational creatures be disabused of: for as there really is a kind of nothingness in the creature, there is no preserving the due subordination which is necessary to their virtue and true happiness, without keeping up a sense of their constant dependence on the supreme being, considering themselves, as they truly

* 1 Tim. v. 21.

† Job, iv. 17. 18.

‡ Job, xv. 15.

|| 1 Tim. iii. 6.

are, nothing, yea less than nothing, worse than nothing, without him, and without always regarding him, as he really is, the only and the perpetual source of all that is good.

5. As the perfection of God's works, and what therefore he must have chiefly in view, is the eternal preservation of virtue, and consequently of happiness, among rational creatures, means must be used for this purpose that are suitable to their rational natures. Of these there are none that seem to be more effectual than some perpetual and standing monuments of the unsuspected weakness of the most excellent created nature, when left to itself; of the irrecoverable depravation, which is the consequence of sin once admitted; of the infectious taint, and the virulent poison thereof; and of the misery it deserves, and necessarily involves those in who commit it. The permitting of the fall of some of the angels, with the dreadful corruption of their once pure and holy natures, to that surprising pitch of wickedness they are now arrived at, together with the eternal and exemplary punishment thereof, seems highly proper for some of these purposes. But for others of them, something farther still was necessary.

That it is not inconsistent with perfect wisdom and goodness to produce an immense variety of creatures, and particularly intelligent agents, not all of them in the highest possible degree of moral perfection and happiness, but of higher and lower orders, with all manner of different natural powers, and circumstantial advantages, from the first of the seraphim to the infant of a Hottentot, is undeniably evident from the fact. But as the last, however necessary in the scale of being, seems not so fit to be the immediate production of him who looks upon all his works as they come from his own hands, and pronounces them to be very good; what could not so fitly be the immediate production of the supreme being, is the consequence of free agency in a nature which was created perfectly pure and holy by God at the first.

Amidst the stupenduous variety of God's works, it appears from the example of this earth which we inhabit, that, besides the immediate production of each

individual by the power of God directly, it is not unworthy of his wisdom to create a whole species, by including innumerable individuals in one root, from which the several individuals of the same common nature do proceed, and are gradually unfolded, as it were, by way of propagation. One effect of which constitution must be, that if this nature be corrupted, or grows degenerate in the root, which has in fact been the case of the human nature, the infection cannot but spread over all the branches.

The ends which infinite wisdom had in view, as in all his works, so particularly in producing a species of creatures of such a nature and constitution, and permitting the whole nature to be corrupted in the root, may be so deep, and so many, (for if several different ends are oft-times obtained through the same means, by the contrivance even of a wise man, why should God be suspected of less sagacity?), that it would be presumptuous for any of us to imagine that we have dived into them all. But, without pretending any thing like this, or so much as mentioning the ends obtained by that wonderful redemption which it afforded so proper an opportunity for, and the final and glorious salvation of a part of the species; we need not doubt but the perishing of others will serve one noble purpose, beyond what could be obtained by the destruction of the fallen angels, namely, to be a perpetual memorandum to other rational creatures of the terrible consequences of a single act of sin, the extensive and virulent contagion there is in it, having so deeply infected a whole species, that, with the most amazing folly and obstinacy, they have rejected even a salvation expressly offered to some, and obscurely hinted to more of them, and eluded the very means that divine mercy has used for their recovery; and thereby aggravated their provocation of God to such a degree, that the very depriving many of them of an opportunity of salvation, by cutting them off in their infancy, will appear to have been so far from being a hard measure, that it must have been compassionate mercy thus to prevent those higher degrees of misery to which they might have exposed themselves by a longer life in this world.

And whatever proportion of the human race may be in the number of the damned, this can give us no idea of the proportion there may be, upon the whole, between the number of God's rational creatures that are holy and happy, and such of them as are in a state of sin and misery. It is not at all improbable, that the existence of the last, and the permission of their fall, was, in the decree of God, intended in order to the increase, both of the number of the first, and of the degree of their holiness and happiness. This earth of ours is but a point in comparison with the solar system; the solar system is a yet more inconsiderable point in comparison with the rest of the material creation which our eyes behold; what proportion it may bear to the whole, it is impossible for us to guess; nor do we know what proportion there is between the inhabitants of material worlds and intelligences that are altogether immaterial, or what creatures may yet be produced through the endless duration: and therefore, when it is yielded that many of Adam's posterity will perish, to stickle upon the mere proportion of their numbers, seems to arise from not reflecting how inconsiderable a proportion the whole species bears to the rest of the creation. If we had never seen any other house in a great and opulent city but a single prison, what a folly would it be to take our measure of that city's prosperity from the objects that were in our view? And yet the minutest of the vermin that crawls on the back of a prisoner is not so little, in comparison with this whole habitable globe, as it is in comparison with the universe.

That the whole human race is now in a fallen state, a state of sin and misery, and consequently not in the original state in which they were created by God, but that the human nature must have undergone a very considerable alteration, or suffered a moral corruption or depravity, is a fact so obvious, that the least doubt thereof can be nothing else but one of its consequences, and so is itself one of the clearest proofs and evidences of the very thing which is doubted or denied: for such a doubt can only proceed from the low and corrupted ideas we now have of what perfect holiness should be. The more depraved our nature is, the less shocked we

must needs be with, and less sensible of, those perpetual transgressions of the divine law, which a being of perfect holiness cannot behold without detestation. While a hardened sinner, who lives by robbery on the highway, could not be made sensible of any immorality at all in an action where he attacked, and intended to deprive a man of his whole substance, provided he had been so far prevailed on, by the complaints and entreaties of the sufferer, as to accept of five guineas, to spare an hundred which he had in his power, nay, while he is boasting of it as a singular instance of generosity; even an imperfectly good man, on the other hand, mourns in secret for the remnant of covetousness which he finds in his disposition, though restrained by grace from breaking out into any overt acts, and those inordinate motions and affections of his soul to any thing that is his neighbour's, which no man upon earth can absolutely clear himself of, and which those only are most deeply and penitently sensible of who are accustomed to observe what passes within them, and who have the greatest regard for the law of God. Hence it is that the greatest complaints of the corruption of our nature comes from men of the most religious characters; while the mention of it is regarded as a sort of cant among the most profligate part of the world; and that in a pretty exact proportion to the degree of their depravity, which, in so far as it prevails, blunts our sensibility of the evil of sin.

Let any one reflect but a little, not only upon the wars and bloodshed, the rapine and oppression, the treachery and cruelty, the cheats and frauds, the lust, ambition, and covetousness, the profanity and irreligion, the ingratitude to God and men, worldly-mindedness, &c. wherewith the earth is filled, but upon the miseries and calamities which do likewise abound therein; let him consider, that there are not merely the product of mens vices, which indeed of themselves are sufficient to make this world a most uncomfortable habitation, especially to the best men, but are likewise, in a great measure, the immediate hand of God; let him reflect upon the famines, the pestilences, the earthquakes, the inundations, the very inclemencies of the

air and seasons, the poverty, with its consequences, the straits that many are reduced to, and the hard labour of more, the innumerable diseases and racking pains of body, as well as the torments and anxieties of mind, which some are always suffering, and all are liable to, and in some measure spectators of, the death of friends, with the certainty of our own at last; and then let him say, whether the present state of human nature, involved as it is in so much moral and physical evil, can be thought to be the immediate production of so good and beneficent a being as God; or if it be not highly probable, that it has undergone a very considerable alteration since it came from his perfect hand? An alteration, indeed, of the same kind with that which the city of Lisbon has lately suffered by the earthquake, i. e. to be now reduced to a heap of ruins. Some noble relics there are still to be found of its former grandeur and excellence; but so misplaced, and buried in so much dirt, that to impute the present state of it to the great creator of the world, would be doing him the same dishonour that we would do to an architect, if we should imagine that the broken pieces of sculpture, scarcely appearing through the rubbish of a fallen building, had been placed so by his direction. Curious strokes of the chisel may perhaps appear upon the noblest and most lasting materials; but if we discern here an overturned column, there a bit of a broken capital, or some detached member of a statue half buried in the dust, can we think such a confusion the effect of the architect's art, or agreeable to the original design?

It is true, creatures made originally holy, may, by the exercise of their own free will, corrupt themselves, as Adam and the devils have done. But then the one was placed in paradise, and the other in heaven, from both which happy seats they were immediately banished upon their fall. None of these instances have any thing equivalent to, or any resemblance of, the individuals of the human race, as they now come into the world. Can it be imagined, that, if they are to be considered in an unconnected view, God would bring pure innocents into such a world as this? immerse them at once in

the midst of so much sin, and in the midst of so much misery; where they themselves cannot be altogether without pain, not to say that some of them scarcely taste any thing else, and where none of them who continue in the world at least, are without sin? Does not such a treatment of them, by a being of infinite goodness, naturally suggest to us, that they cannot be considered by him as perfectly innocent; even although the earliest indications of their disposition that can be perceived by others did not too plainly discover a moral corruption of their natures; and though we did not find, to our sad experience, that folly is so bound up in the hearts of children, that the rod of correction can hardly drive it away?

It would be easy to prove the universal corruption of the human nature, in its present state, from the scripture. It is what the Apostle Paul himself has done from passages of the Old Testament, in the 3d chapter of his epistle to the Romans. But I have chosen rather to insist upon undeniable facts, that are obvious to every one's observation; because, whatever difficulty be in the matter, it is far from being a difficulty peculiar to revealed religion. On the contrary, the facts that occasion the chief difficulty are so extremely obvious, that they have not escaped the observation even of the Heathens themselves. Ovid, in his *Metamorphosis*, gives us a sort of system of Pagan theology; where we meet with a golden age that subsisted at the beginning of the world, which gradually degenerated into an iron one. And his contemporary, Horace, seems to have been of opinion, that it was still growing worse and worse:

“ *Ætas parentum peior avis tulit*
 “ *Nos nequiores, mox daturos*
 “ *Progeniem vitiosiore.*”

In his *Satires*, he speaks of it as an acknowledged truth, that every man is born a sinner:



“ Nam vitiis nemo sine nascitur; optimus ille
“ Qui minimis urgetur.”

To the same purpose Propertius :

“ Unicuique dedit vitium Natura creato.”

The philosophers were as sensible of this as the poets. Cicero complains, “ Hominem a natura noverca in lucem edi, corpore nudo, fragili atque infirmo animo, ad molestias anxio, ad timores humili, ad labores debili, ad libidines proclivi, in quo divinus ignis sit obrutus, ingenium et mores.” And elsewhere he says, “ Simul ac editi sumus in lucem, in omni continuo pravitate versamur.” To the same purpose, Seneca says, “ Hac conditione nati sumus, animalia non paucioribus animi quam corporis morbis.” And again, “ Omnia in omnibus vitia sunt; sed non omnia in singulis extant.” Vid. *Baxt. vol. 2. p. 67.* *Du Plessis Morn. de verit. ch. 17.* *Tillotf. vol. 3. p. 309.* *Rollin's Hist. vol. 1. p. 42.*

Now this being a visible fact, which may be minced and disguised, but cannot be wholly denied, revelation rather accounts for this fact, than acquaints us with what is so notour and so obvious, and which, if the account given us of it by revelation be rejected, is indeed altogether inexplicable. If God be not acting the part of a righteous judge, he is certainly, as Cicero suspected, in the circumstances of our entry into the world, at least not acting the part of a kind and beneficent parent towards his own offspring, that never in any respect offended him. But how we could have offended him before the present constitution of things was fixed, is the question; and a question it is that may well be called, *dignus vindice nodus*. The light of nature leaves us, without so much as offering the least shadow of a solution, under the whole weight of the difficulty; and therefore revelation is so far from having any additional weight to bear from what it discovers to us in this matter, that this discovery carries its own evidence upon

the very face of it, and adds a sort of authority to that revelation where it is contained, by loosing so intricate a knot, in a manner that is both surprising and satisfactory.

There we are informed of another important fact, which at once unravels the whole mystery, viz. that men are not what they were supposed to be by the Heathen world, a species of unconnected individuals, without any common relation to one original parent, as perhaps many other rational creatures are, who therefore can hurt none but the individual by their immoral conduct; but the whole human species, not yet unfolded into individuals, was, at the creation, comprehended in one original root, or, to use a scripture-expression, all mankind were in the loins of their father Adam, from whom they derive their nature. He surely had no reason to complain of any unkind circumstances in his situation, being amply provided, according to the same history, with whatever was necessary either to holiness or happiness. If he had continued in that state of purity which he had from his maker, he had transmitted the same holy and happy nature to his posterity: but the effect of corrupting so comprehensive a nature as his was, could not but be, the transmission of a nature so corrupted, and now depraved, to his posterity, in a word, the moral infection of a whole species; so that, as the scripture expresses it, "by one man's disobedience, many were made sinners *."

This being once admitted, the whole difficulty is removed, as it plainly appears to have arisen from a false supposition. The difficulty lies in those unfavourable circumstances in which it is supposed God brings creatures into the world that are perfectly innocent. But if any credit is given to his own revelation, it appears that he has to do with a species that is already corrupted and depraved; and that this depravation is no act of his, who created their nature pure and holy; so that he is now acting in the capacity of a holy, just, and righteous judge. At least the difficulty is reduced to a much nar-

* Rom. v. 19.

rower compass: for now it consists wholly in resolving one question, which, one would think, we need be at no great loss about; and *is*, Whether God can (*id possumus quod jure possumus*) create such a nature? or, Whether the production, not only of independent individuals, but of a species such as mankind, to be propagated out of one root, is what the supreme being can be said to have no right to do? For if a right to create such a species cannot be denied him, then all the rest follows of course; at least the evil that turns out in the matter is not his doing, but the creature's. The evil of sin is the act of the creature only, and the evil of punishment the necessary effect thereof. It is inconsistent with any idea we can form of God's moral character, for him to act a part that is really unkind to a being that is perfectly innocent, or to treat any thing otherwise than as it is. And as it would evidently be unkind to bring innocent creatures into such a world as this is, plunging them in the midst of sin and misery, and putting them under the absolute power of, yea, obliging them to be subject to, guilty sinners, that are in rebellion against him, surrounded on all hands with innumerable examples of wickedness, even in those for whom they are bound to have a regard, with powers and faculties vastly inferior to theirs, and by no means equal to the shock of such temptations, nay, actually suffering that pain and misery which, from the hand of God, can be nothing but the punishment of sin; the difficulty, therefore, must be altogether unsurmountable, upon the supposition that they are innocent. But the moment it appears they are guilty creatures, the difficulty evanishes; for all this is but treating them as they really are; and it is not at all inconsistent with the divine perfections to give harsh usage to a guilty creature, or to punish sin, in whomsoever it may be found. But how can they be considered as sinners, so early, so certainly, and so universally, as to afford a sufficient foundation for the present constitution of things, unless the disobedience of one has indeed made us all sinners? unless the whole nature be infected with a moral corruption and depravity, that renders it disapproveable in the eye of a perfectly holy being? If a gardener

had a parcel of trees in his nursery, that might be some good, some bad, he would readily wait till he saw how they turned out, before he disposed of them; and would not destine them all for the woods or the hedges, unless he certainly knew, from the nature of the seed, that they were all undoubtedly crabs.

Nothing in God's conduct, then, remains to be accounted for, but his producing such a species of rational agents, that do all derive their nature from one common parent; pure and holy, if he had persevered in the state wherein he was created, and stained with moral impurity, upon supposition of his defection. And who will pretend to say, that God had no right to use his own liberty, because his creatures might make a wrong use of theirs? that God might not (for wise and good reasons, without which he does nothing) form any species of creatures, in whom there was no bad ingredient of which he was the author, merely because the creature might abuse the powers he was endued with? Is he to be answerable for the consequences of what is not an act of his, but of one to whom he had communicated a power of behaving otherwise?

Adam is, by the Apostle Paul, said to be the figure of him that was to come *, i. e. the public head or common representative of all his natural posterity, as Christ is the head or representative of all his spiritual seed: That as in Christ all are made alive, so in Adam all die †: That as by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life; so by the offence of one, judgement came upon all men to condemnation ‡; or, in the words of our Catechism, "That the covenant was made with Adam, not only for himself, but for his posterity." They who boggle at this, do not seem to advert to the facts which are and must be admitted. Was not the ground cursed immediately upon the fall of our first parents, that ground upon which all their posterity were to subsist? Was not the whole frame of nature new modelled, the very weather altered, and the inclemency of the seasons established, so as to be the instruments of divine wrath up-

* Rom. v. 14.

† 1 Cor. xv. 22.

‡ Rom. v. 18.

on a race that was not yet born? Were not the seeds of diseases and death cast into that one blood, of which were made all nations of men who were to dwell on all the face of the earth? In a word, was not the whole constitution of things so fixed, with respect to other circumstances besides these, some of which have been formerly mentioned, as to be suited, not to an innocent, but to a guilty race? When we see the penalty of the covenant, which is the very thing most to be bogled at, put into such a way of execution that none can escape, where can any scruple remain about their being included in it? See *Nichol's Conf. with a Thief*, P. 1. p. 232.

And indeed, how could the matter possibly be otherwise? They who yield that God has a right to create such a species as the human race, do, *ipso facto*, yield likewise, that he has a right to covenant with the natural head of that race; that according to his behaviour, so shall the condition of his posterity be; because, in the nature of the thing, this must be the unavoidable consequence. As they derive their nature from no other source, it really is not so much as a matter of choice. If a spring be poisoned, undoubtedly so will the streams that flow from it. He that knows what kind of fruit he grafts upon a tree in his garden, knows of what quality the fruit will be through every individual which will be produced by it as long as it stands, and, without all question, devotes the ground occupied thereby to that particular kind of fruit, and no other. This point, I dare say, would not appear so intricate, were it not that our idea thereof is apt to be confounded by a comparison of it with other instances of representation, where there is no natural and necessary connection; nor are they represented personally tainted with the criminal disposition of their representative: whereas in the present case none suffers on the account of Adam's sin who is not himself infected with the same immoral qualities. And has not God a right to visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, not only to the third and fourth, but to all the generations of them that do likewise hate him*? There cannot,

* Calv. Inst. l. 2. c. 1. § 8. m.

therefore, I think, be any difficulty in this matter, if the moral depravity of all Adam's posterity be allowed to be the consequence of his fall, which is therefore the point chiefly to be illustrated.

How this moral depravity is communicated, may be a question too intricate to be solved by us, especially as the scripture affords us no light for our direction in it. But then it is certain that there are hundreds of things whose existence is indisputable, of which it is impossible to explain or comprehend the manner. Yet by way of hypothesis, and in no other view, some things have been observed which may help to give us a faint idea of the matter, such as,

1. That while the infant is in the mother's womb, as then the infant and mother together make but one whole, it is more than probable, that the same impressions that are made on the brain and the heart of the mother, are likewise made on the correspondent parts of the child. There is a communication between the mother's blood and animal spirits and those of the child. Her brain has not only a relation to all the parts of her own body, but also to the brain of the infant, and by that means to all the parts of its body, which are extremely tender and delicate, and easily susceptible of any impression. There are several known facts that put this out of doubt. How frequently has it happened, that when a woman with child has had a deep impression made upon her imagination by the sight of a person marked in an extraordinary manner, the child in her womb has been exactly marked in the same manner? Some instances there have been of children born with their bodies broken in those very places where the mothers have seen criminals broken upon the wheel; the impression being made so deep upon the mother's imagination as to be communicated to that of the child, and so to the several parts of its tender body. And do we not see sometimes certain peculiar weaknesses of mind run, as we say, in a blood, and continued for some generations from parents to children?

2. Such is the nature of that union which is between the soul and body, that upon certain motions of the body there arise certain ideas in the soul, as, on the o-

ther hand, such and such ideas in the soul occasion correspondent motions in the body. This constitution would have been attended with no inconvenience had Adam preserved his innocence; for if the parent had no inordinate lust or inclination to sensible things, but thought of them always in a manner suitable to a state of innocence, or, in other words, had no ideas but what were pure and holy, none else could be communicated to the infant, in its weakest and tenderest state, through all these connections.

3. But if once the imagination of the mother is defiled, and her attachment to sensible objects is supposed to be in any measure inordinate, it is next to impossible that the imagination of the child, so long closely connected with hers, should not be infected with the poison; and in that weak state of its rational powers, it is no wonder that its will contracts a bias, and comes by degrees to be habituated to refer its most agreeable enjoyments to the body and sensible objects: and as nothing contributes more to the darkening of our understandings, and weakening our rational powers, than the violent and inordinate motions of our inferior appetites, by this means all spiritual ideas will be obliterated, which otherwise probably would have been the first and the highest entertainment of our rational souls.

4. And yet nothing of all this evil can be ascribed to God. Every thing that is wrong in the whole process is an act of the creature, not of the creator, who formed a nature that was beautiful and excellent, as it came from his hands; but, for wise reasons, of such a constitution as would have had good effects if man had done his duty, but the most extensive bad consequences upon supposition of his misbehaviour.

5. Nay, the infection of every individual is not only the act of the parent, but whatever necessity there may be of the effect following such acts, yet, even on the part of the infected, this necessity is only a moral, not a physical necessity, and so does not exempt the infant from personal blame. The will is in its own nature so far free, that, in the most dangerous situation, whoever is endued with that faculty, is still accountable for the motions thereof. In this case, indeed, there is such a

train of circumstances, that not one of the human race ever did, or ever will, resist the violent temptation. But this, as shall be shown hereafter, does not alter the nature of the necessity, nor excuse the agent from the blame of any volitions that are not conformable to the law of God. Particular passions indulged by adult sinners to the most inveterate habit, lay them under a necessity that is equally and as certainly invincible by their own natural powers; and yet, being only a moral necessity, does not prevent the imputation of sin to them upon account of any evil actions they are thereby led into. The reason of this is not because such habits are of their own contracting, and that it is originally their own fault that they indulged such passions, but because the necessity arising therefrom is only a moral, not a physical necessity. Suppose a man that was wont to give 10 l. a-year to the poor, should have squandered his substance by riotous living, and reduced himself to poverty through his own fault, his omitting to relieve a miserable object is no sin, because the impossibility of his doing it, though really his own fault, is an absolute or physical one; while, at the same time, a covetous miser, who will as certainly omit this part of his duty, sins every time he is guilty of such omission, because the necessity of his omitting it is only a moral necessity, and consists in the wrong disposition of his will with respect to that particular action.

These observations may serve in some measure to account for the manner in which the contagion is communicated, even upon the common supposition, that the souls of men are not created till the bodies are formed in the mother's belly. The scripture, however, determines nothing about the time when the souls are or were created, unless the declaration of God's having rested on the seventh day from all his works, and what is said of Levi, that he paid tithes in Abraham, being in the loins of his father when Melchisedec met him, be (as it is thought by some) a determination that they were all created at the beginning of the world. I shall only say, that this can scarcely be pronounced impossible by any who considers the late discoveries by the microscope of animated *animalcula in femine masculino*, to-

gether with that amazing subtlety and divisibility of matter which has been demonstrated by philosophers. And though this be not the common opinion, it has been received by many of no small note in the learned world, such as the late M. Leibnitz, F. Mallebranche, M. Boyle, Dr Pitcairn, and many others.

If it could be supposed that the souls of all mankind, as well as the seeds of their bodies, were actually in Adam, there could be little difficulty in accounting for the communication of his moral depravity to them. But as it is agreed among naturalists, that at least the seeds of their bodies were, this very supposition admits of another account of the matter, which is embraced by several writers upon this subject, as follows. Such is the connection between our souls and bodies, that it is well known the general temper or disposition of the mind depends very much on the crasis or constitution of the body. According as certain humours prevail, men are either of a melancholy, phlegmatic, passionate, &c. complexion. "The animal spirits," as Bishop Burnet expresses it, "receiving their quality from that of the blood, a new and a strong fermentation in the blood might dispose Adam to be easily inflamed by appetites and passions, it might put him more in the power of his body, and make his body much more apt to be fired at outward objects, which might sink all spiritual and pure ideas in him, and raise gross ones with much fury and rapidity. Hereby his whole frame might be much corrupted, and that might go so deep in him, that all those who descended from him might be defiled by it, as we see madness and some chronical diseases pass from parents to their children."

The bishop supposes that all this might be the physical effect of the forbidden fruit, as a very small accident may so alter the whole mass of the blood, that in a very few minutes it may be totally changed. But if any object to this, there is no necessity for having recourse to such a supposition; for such is the influence of the mind upon the body, as well as of the body upon the mind, that any unlawful passion or appetite being once indulged, this might, according to the principles of sound

philosophy, or rather constant experience, set the blood in a fermentation, and occasion the whole series of bad consequences

All these being only hypotheses, I take no farther part in any of them but as they serve to show the possibility of what God has revealed to us concerning original sin, and that it is abundantly consistent with the nature of things; which any of them sufficiently does. It is a matter of greater importance to form a distinct and clear idea of the nature of that moral corruption where-with the souls of all mankind are now infected. In order to which, the following observations may be of some use.

1. If, with any sort of accuracy, we take a view of what passes in our minds, we must be sensible, that besides the different acts and determinations of our wills, tending towards different objects, which are infinitely diversified according to our various circumstances, there are some inclinations of the will that are constant and perpetual, according to the various objects that fall in our way, and the various humours we happen to be in; sometimes perhaps we chuse to gratify our taste, sometimes our eye, sometimes our ear, at another time our imagination, then our understanding, &c. These acts of our will, by reason of the diversity of them, we are easily sensible of, and can perceive the beginning of a new act when it tends to a different object. But such determinations of our will as are constant and invariable may not perhaps be so sensibly perceived, because they are perpetual and uninterrupted; yet are nevertheless certain and real. For example, an inclination to good in the general, to happiness or pleasure, real or apparent, is what all agree in, and that so uninterruptedly, that there is no point or moment of our existence wherein it is ever in the least abated or changed. Now, tho' we may be apt to imagine that the will is not active in this inclination, or rather do not attend thereto, because, as I observed, it is so constant, that we cannot distinguish particular acts in that which is one uniform, unvaried, and perpetual act; yet it is certain that in nothing whatever are we more willing than in this propensity of our soul to good in general; and indeed it is

only an application of this general will wherein consists the diversity of particular willings, that all finite spirits may perceive in themselves. A good man, when he breathes out an ardent love to the best and most amiable being, and a wicked sinner, when he is roving from lust to lust, and seeking that gratification in one created object which he missed in another, though they tread in very different paths, yet have equally this constant inclination to good in the general.

2. If we turn our view more particularly to such creatures as are perfectly pure and holy, as the angels in heaven, we may observe something farther, correspondent to what has been observed of all rational creatures whatever. In every particular act of their obedience to God, there must be a new and different act or determination of their will, according as their duty calls them to different services; and as the particular acts of their will may be varied, so there is no one of these particular wills relating to different duties but may be supposed absent, without prejudice to their innocence, being employed in a different piece of service. The acts of the will in all that even in heaven serve God are infinitely diversified, and some of them may be more vigorous and holy than others; but then, besides these particular acts of the will, as every rational being, good or bad, has a general inclination to good, real or apparent, so every perfectly holy spirit, however differently employed, must have a constant uninterrupted tendency of the soul, or acting of the will, towards God. A general inclination of the will to the supreme being is as certain a character of every holy creature, as an inclination to apprehended good is to every rational being; and this general inclination of the will towards God is never interrupted, never varied, while they retain their innocence, as every particular act of their wills in relation to particular duties is; and though we may not perhaps so readily advert to this operation of a perfectly holy will, because it is not subject to variation, or to any new determination, yet in no case whatever is the will really more active and vigorous. This was in Adam that original righteousness, the plentiful fountain from whence flowed all the streams of his actual obedience,

which was his greatest ornament while he continued in, and which he lost when he fell from, his state of innocence. The soul of Adam indeed, being united to a body, could not but by means thereof have sensations impressed upon it from outward objects; but then all his inferior appetites were in a due subordination to his understanding, and his will was never influenced by the first, without the consent and sovereign dictate of the last; otherwise he would have acted contrary to his rational nature, and that beautiful order wherein consisted the excellence of our original constitution, would have been evidently broken: so that had we continued in that original state, the union of the body would not have interrupted that constant inclination of the will to God, which is distinct from, and the source of all the particular acts of that faculty in the course of our obedience, as what could not but have the highest approbation of an uncorrupted understanding.

3. When our first parents gave their consent to the temptation of the devil, there was not only a particular act of their will, in opposition to the particular law of God forbidding them to eat of the fatal fruit; but they lost that constant general inclination to God wherein consisted their original righteousness. And to this succeeded as uniform, uninterrupted, and prevailing an inclination to sense in the general. The original constitution of our nature was then overturned. The inferior appetites and unbridled passions, no longer under the government or controul of the understanding, carried the will headlong in opposition to its dictates; and their turbulent and contrary motions, like a cloud of dust raised by a tempest from the ground into a sky that had been calm and clear, darkened the light of the understanding, that superior sun in the soul, and intercepted the knowledge of God, the most refreshing and enlivening comfort of a rational creature. But here it is to be observed, that as every rational creature, besides the particular determinations of its will to particular objects, has a constant unvaried inclination to good in the general; and as every pure and holy soul, untainted with moral depravity, besides the particular duties it may be engaged in, which are different and va-

riable, has a constant invariable determination of its will to God, that suffers no interruption; so every human creature since the fall, besides those particular lusts, the gratification of which it may at any time be, or not be engaged in, has likewise a constant bias of the will from God to the creature, a perpetual unintermitted inclination to sense in the general, which is properly what we call original sin, and the fatal source from whence all actual sins do proceed. Innumerable are the modifications which this general bias is capable of. Sometimes a sinner may be acted by ambition, sometimes by covetousness; some men by their constitution may be inclined to passion, some to voluptuousness or sensuality, some to melancholy and despair. But none of these particular determinations or actings of the will are properly original sin. Several of them are contrary to one another, all of them are liable to change, and any one of them may be supposed absent at a particular time in a particular sinner; whereas original sin is that unvaried and perpetual opposition to God, and inclination to sense in the general, which is so constant that there is no succession to be perceived in it, and is never interrupted in the least moment of our lives. Regenerated saints may be enabled, by the power of grace, to oppose its particular actings, and to restrain it within certain bounds; but till once this clay tabernacle be dissolved, not a human soul is ever one moment free from it. The old man may be nailed to the cross, and mortally wounded; yet, to our last breath, the life that still remains will manifest itself by constant struggles.

From this account of the matter, the reason is obvious why we are so apt to doubt of the concurrence of our will in original sin. In particular actions, as there is a sensible variety in our inclination, we can perceive the beginning of its tendency to such an object, we can perceive an interruption of it, and the renewal of it again, with the several occasions thereof; and so the working of that faculty is more obvious even to the inattentive: whereas in original sin, the action of our will being constant and perpetual, without variation or interruption, and there not being a moment of our existence wherein we are without this inclination, it is, for these reasons, not so

readily adverted to. Thus in a ship under sail, when it is tossed with the winds, veering and shifting its course, the motion is then plainly perceived by all the passengers; but when going uniformly before a steady gale, the motion becomes insensible, and is only inferred from knowledge and experience. A vindictive person, however sensible he may be of the activity of his will in any particular design for inflicting revenge upon an enemy, which may be various and changeable, does not so readily advert to that uniform, habitual, and uninterrupted hatred of him, which he constantly indulges, and from which all his attempts of revenge proceed. In this manner, the activity of our will in actual transgressions is abundantly perceptible, because these have a beginning and an end, we rove from this to that, and one succeeds another; but original sin is one uniform unvaried tenor of the disposition, a constant uninterrupted inclination to sense, which leads us into the commission of all actual transgressions; and so, by the very uninterrupted perpetuity of it, is less discernible. But this is so far from being a good proof that the will is not concerned therein, that, on the contrary, it is indeed an irrefragable evidence that it acts in this sin with the greatest vigour, even with so vehement a propensity as never to suffer a moment's interruption; so that, in allusion to an expression of the Apostle Paul concerning this very inward propensity, when he would represent it in the most odious light, that sin is exceeding sinful *, we may likewise say, that in this sin our will acts exceeding willingly. And to be sure it is a disposition in itself so highly immoral, so disapproveable in the sight of God, and so inconsistent with true happiness, that without the addition of any actual transgression, it must render every one who is possessed of it incapable of the enjoyment of God, and expose him to everlasting misery. This, I acknowledge, could not be said, were we merely passive in the matter; but, in truth, we are so far from being so, that it is a constant act of our will that original sin consists in. It may be called, in the language of the school, a permanent act, while actual transgression consists in successive acts.

* Rom. vii. 13.

The most specious pretext for alledging that we are passive in it, is, that the body is the means of its conveyance; and that the constitution of our body does not depend upon our will, but that the fermentation or motion of all its parts are effects produced by physical causes, and are all of physical necessity, which is inconsistent with moral imputation. But besides that the original cause which sets these physical causes a working is really of a moral nature, I shall readily acknowledge that in so far as any irregular motion in the body of a parent produces a like motion in the body of a child, and in so far as correspondent impressions are communicated to the soul of that child, so far the effects are produced by a physical necessity; but then, so far there is no sin. Then moral evil or sin begins, when the consent of the will is yielded to what is wrong; and whatever necessity there may be of this, it is plain to every one who understands the terms, that it is only a moral, not a physical necessity, and consequently is perfectly consistent with our being accountable for it. It is God himself that established, and whose irresistible power is perhaps the immediate executor of the laws of motion, whereof matter is the subject, as well as of the laws of that union which is between our bodies and souls; and therefore, in so far as these laws operate, to be sure the effect is physically necessary, and therefore is not imputable to those who, in that respect, are mere patients, and not in any degree agents. Nor can God be the author of any thing that is morally evil. For this very reason we may be certainly assured, that the consent of a human will to the least degree of moral evil can never be the necessary effect of any of the laws of nature, or the immediate production of divine power, but must be the act of a created agent: and indeed these ideas, when they are preserved from confusion, and attended to with any sort of accuracy or distinctness, do plainly involve or infer one another. Nothing can be morally evil that is not the act of a will; and being the act of a will implies, in the very nature of the thing, that it is not a physical effect of the laws of motion, or of nature.

As to the effect which original sin has upon our understandings, in darkening our minds, and rendering

them grossly ignorant of, and inattentive to, all ideas of God, or of spiritual and divine things; so as in experience it is found, that all such ideas are mighty strange to children, and it costs the utmost labour to inculcate and explain them, before they can be made to comprehend any thing of that sort; a little advertence to the nature of things will soon make it evident, that this is our own fault, and imputable to us as a moral evil: for the power of the will being irresistible in every rational agent, all the other faculties of the soul are entirely under its direction; and therefore, upon supposition of that aversion to God, and inclination to sense, which original sin consists in, there is no doubt but our will is only solicitous to apply the understanding to such objects as are agreeable to its disposition, and to call it off from whatever it has no relish or pleasure in. By this means the understanding will be constantly employed upon sensible objects, as what are most agreeable to a depraved will. The contemplation of God, or of any thing that is spiritual, must be very irksome, and consequently so far from meeting with the least encouragement, that the understanding will never be suffered to dwell upon any such ideas, or any reasoning that leads to them, but constantly put upon exercising its whole force upon those ideas wherein the will places its supreme happiness; and any reasoning that favours the agreeable deception will only find encouragement: so that, being habituated to gross and carnal ideas only, all spiritual and divine ones must become uncouth, and be regarded as intruders; and thus a corrupt soul is rendered utterly incapable of finding out or entertaining truth, and is adapted only to the embracing of error. But as this is really the process of the affair, can any thing be conceived more highly faulty on our part, or more imputable to ourselves, as a moral evil?

This is that likeness of Adam *, wherein we are told he begat a son, after he had effaced the likeness of God †, wherein he was originally made. This is that moral corruption which provoked God against the work of his own hands, when he saw that “every imagina-

* Gen. v. 3.

† Gen. v. 1.

"tion of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually *;" which the scripture constantly imputes to all mankind without exception †; which David confessed himself guilty of even in his mother's womb ‡; which Job, Eliphaz, and Bildad, were sensible is common to all that are born of a woman ||; and which Solomon acknowledges no man in this world ever did, or ever will, rid himself of **. This is that which we find so frequently mentioned in the New Testament, especially in the writings of the Apostle Paul, as existing and operating in all mankind without exception, (even in regenerated believers themselves, where it lusts against the spirit ††), under the several denominations of *the flesh, lust or concupiscence, the old man, &c.* But, instead of attempting any formal proof of this from passages of scripture, which may be met with in the writings of innumerable divines, and which indeed are so plain and obvious, that they could not fail to have an effect, were there not a prejudice against the doctrine, I shall rather consider the objection which sets criticism on work to invalidate these proofs. And, as far as I understand it, it is to the following purpose.

That a necessity of such a nature as never fails to have its effect, must certainly be a physical necessity, or call it by what term we please, must be inconsistent with moral agency, as it would be unreasonable to blame a man for that which, in fact, no man ever did or will avoid: That at least the youngest infants, before they have committed any actual transgression, can be considered in no other light than as perfect innocents, seeing the want of spiritual desires must be imputed to a natural incapacity; and if the whole tendency of their souls is to sense, it is because they have not, nor in the strictest sense can have, any other ideas; and is therefore a necessity of the strictest sort: That, in their infant state, they are neither capable of moral good, nor moral evil, in a word, are not properly moral agents: That the highest sense in which we can conceive any

* Gen. vi. 5. † Pf. xiv. 2. 3.; Rom. iii. 9. 19.

‡ Pf. li. 5. || Job, xiv. 4; xv. 14; xxv. 4.

** Prov. xx. 9.; 1 Kings, viii. 46.; Eccl. vii. 20.

†† Gal. v. 17.

notion of original sin in them, is only such a tendency of disposition as will lead them to the commission of sin, when they are capable of it; but that it would be the hardest measure to treat them as sinners before they are so, merely because of a disposition to it, of which they are not the authors: That such of them as die in infancy, never having had that disposition put to the trial, are in reality not sinners: That it would therefore be a piece of injustice, whereof so good a being as God is must be incapable, to make them eternally miserable, when in fact they never did, nor were capable to commit any act of sin.

The whole force of this objection, in all the parts of it, and indeed of all the excuses wherewith sinners are so apt to defend themselves, and to remove from themselves, upon God, the blame of their own immoral conduct, lies in the first assertion, That any necessity which is universal, or which, in fact, none ever did or will get the better of, is inconsistent with moral agency. If this were true, it would indeed confute the doctrine of original sin; but then it would, at the same time, destroy our ideas of both virtue and vice, and annihilate, not only original sin, but actual transgression too. This, however, is so far from being true, that, for as specious an appearance as it may have at first view, it is what all who consider the subject thoroughly, and are not bent upon destroying the idea of moral agency, are obliged, upon some occasion or other, to give up.

In truth, the nature of any necessity does by no means depend upon the number of those who are affected by it, but upon the kind of causes by which the events are effected. The characteristical difference that distinguishes a moral from a physical necessity is this: When an event is produced by other causes than the will of the agent in question, and such as are not resistible by him, though ever so willing, that is a physical necessity: on the other hand, whatever is the effect of the will of the agent in question, and would not have existed had he willed the contrary, that, if it may be called necessary, is only a moral, not a physical necessity. The nature of these several causes, and the manner of their operation, must, without all question, be precisely, and in all respects,

the same, how many or how far soever the particular instances of them are. If I had a boy of seven years of age for my servant, and should order him to carry a boll of bear upon his back out of my barn, it would not be his fault to disobey my orders; because no will or inclination of his could render the thing possible. Again, were he a strong man to whom such orders were given, abundantly able to carry it farther if he had a mind, but, out of mere laziness, should refuse it, in that case, would it not be his fault to refuse it? Suppose I had a hundred servants, all of the same disposition, equally able, and equally unwilling, and they should every one of them, without exception, refuse, would this alter the nature of the crime, or turn the inability into a physical, instead of a moral one? If there never had existed, of the posterity of Adam, but one man, there could have been no place for this objection; and the account that has been given of the moral corruption of his nature might have been admitted, at least for any thing that is in this part of the objection. But if this may be a just account of the matter in the case of one man, can it be less just when there are two in the same circumstances? Or suppose them ever so many, if it implies no contradiction in a single instance, the mere circumstance of numbers can never alter the nature of the case, turn the same cause into a very different one, or render that impossible in millions which is allowed to be possible in one.

That a necessity which is universal, or which, in fact, never did, nor ever will, admit of a single exception, is perfectly consistent with moral agency, is a truth so evident, that it is, on some occasions at least, admitted by all who have bestowed any thought upon the subject. Even the Jesuits and the Arminians, who have carried the notion of liberty farthest, and who found their reasonings upon the alledged absurdity of the proposition, are frequently obliged, however, to have recourse to it, in answer to objections that are made against themselves: and indeed the instances are so numerous where it cannot be denied, that it must either be admitted, or the difference between moral good and evil must be given up to the worst of infidels.

God himself is necessarily good *, not surely in the physical sense of the word *necessity*, as if he were acted upon by another cause, but in the moral sense only, i. e. there never was, and in fact there never will be, a single instance in the smallest degree to the contrary. But does this in any measure detract from the moral excellency of his actions, (to omit the terms physical and moral necessity)? Does this render him one whit less the true and real author of them, or ascribe any efficiency in the production of them to other causes, independent of him, and irresistible by him? which are the only proper grounds of one's being esteemed an agent or a patient. It is impossible for God to lie; not that any external cause, independent of his own will, produces the effect of his speaking the truth; but it is certain, that in fact he never did, and never will speak falsehood. But is the moral goodness of his veracity a whit the less for this? on the contrary, is it not rather so much the more strictly and properly the action of his own will?

The elect angels, the departed spirits of good men, and the glorified saints after the resurrection, are or will be so confirmed in holiness, that to all eternity there never will be a single instance of any of them rebelling against God. But are they therefore not moral agents? do they become mere patients? and is there no more virtue, or moral goodness, in any thing they do, than in the motions of a stick or a stone? The devils are all so wicked, that as there never was, so there never will be, a single instance of any of them returning to their duty. Is this an evidence that their wickedness is not imputable to them, and that they are now perfectly innocent creatures? Again, so universal is the moral corruption of mankind, that there never was, there never will be, a single instance of an unregenerated sinner complying with the terms of salvation, without an exertion of God's almighty power †. Is there therefore no moral evil in the sins they commit? Is their wickedness

* See Seneca, Pref. to Rat. Questions, p. 646. 647.

† Gal. v. 22. : 1 John, iv. 7. ; Matth. vii. 18; John, xv. 4. ; Ezek. xi. 19. and xxxvi. 27. ; 1 Cor. iv. 7. &c. ; John, vi. 44 ; 2 Cor. iii. 5. ; Eph. ii. 10. ; Phil. ii. 13.

no wickedness? and is the robber and assassin no more to be blamed for his cruelty and murder than a tile that is blown upon one's head from the roof of a house? Even the best of men, whilst in this imperfect state, are not altogether free from sins, of infirmity at least; and that so absolutely without exception, that there never was, and there never will be, a just man upon earth that sinneth not *. “And if we say that “we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth “is not in us †.” But is their sin therefore no sin? and is it an error in the inspired writers to call it so?

So far is a moral necessity from being inconsistent with moral agency, or a moral impotence from extenuating or lessening the guilt of sin, (as corrupt sinners would fain persuade themselves), that this is one of those errors, *cujus contrarium est verum*. The higher the degree of moral impotence, or of moral necessity, either to virtue or vice, so much the greater degree is there of moral good or evil, and so much the more truly commendable or discommendable is the character. Of all moral agents God is under the highest necessity to do always what is right, and the devil to do what is wrong; and yet the first is, without all comparison, the best and most amiable character; and there is the highest degree of moral good in his actions; while the other is the worst and most detestable being, and has the most of moral evil in him, of any whatever. Are not the angels who excel in strength, strength in a moral as well as physical sense, are not they endued with higher degrees of holiness than any of us? and yet are they not under a higher degree of moral necessity to be good? Among men, are not they of the best characters, and their actions most highly commendable, who, as the Apostle John expresses it, *cannot* sin, because they are born of God ‡? On the other hand, was the hatred of Joseph, which his brethren indulged themselves in, the more innocent, or had it the less of moral evil in it, because it was so great, that, as the sacred historian tells us, they *could* not speak peaceably unto

* Eccl. vii. 20.; 1 Kings, viii. 46.

† 1 John, i. 8.

‡ 1 John, iii. 9.

him *. Surely the most abandoned sinners, in whom the habits of vice are most deeply rooted, do labour under the greatest moral impotence of acting virtuously, and under the greatest necessity of committing sin; but does this extenuate the guilt of their sin, or lessen the moral evil of their character? Was it by way of excuse, or was it not rather by way of aggravation, that the prophet says to the Jews, "*Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil* †." The greatness of their iniquity, as it is expressed in the preceding verse, and the greatness of the punishment threatened in the following one, do sufficiently decide this question.

I would not have insisted so long upon a thing that is so very plain, and so very certain, were it not the hinge upon which the whole of this objection turns; and that the contrary error, however evidently false, has been so much inculcated by those who plead for the impunity of sin, that it is not easy to beat it out of people's heads again. What else is it but this single circumstance, viz. that a moral necessity is what, in fact, none ever did, or ever will overcome, which has been made a handle of by libertines to confound it with a physical necessity, how different soever they really are, in their nature, grounds, and causes, and in the manner of their operation? And indeed, if this circumstance be sufficient to annihilate the guilt of sin, there is not a sinner in the whole universe who is not intitled to the benefit of it. All the devils and damned spirits, unquestionably, have it to plead: there is not a human creature that comes into the world, without having the same plea, at least as long as they continue in an unregenerated state; and even the sins of infirmity, which good men are subject to, might be vindicated by the same excuse. So that moral evil in general, and moral good too, must all be annihilated at one stroke, if this plea is to be admitted.

But it may be alledged, perhaps, that a mere tendency of the inclination, which has not had an opportunity

* Gen. xxxvii. 4.

† Jer. xiii. 23.

of breaking out into any formal act, especially if it be common to the whole species, is what no individual can justly be blamed for. Indeed, if the very foundation of morality were to be laid, as it has been by some late writers, in a conformity of our actions to whatever inclinations are universal, or common to the species; if the nature of such inclinations, or the objects to which they tend, was of no consideration, but merely the universality of them, or their actual existence in every individual; if this doctrine was to be admitted, I acknowledge, that the carnal dispositions of mankind, and the actions consequent upon them too, instead of being morally evil, would, on the contrary, be morally good. And I make no question but the propagating of such sentiments, so inconsistent with that corruption of our nature which is inculcated in the scripture, and the sense of which is so necessary a prerequisite in order to our compliance with the proposals there made to us, has contributed not a little to the revival of the Popish doctrine, that concupiscence is no sin. But the error of this imagination will be evident from the following considerations *.

1. It is expressly condemned as sinful in the scripture; and the sinfulness of it is spoken of, too, as a discovery which men are of themselves apt to overlook, and which the apostle himself would not have imagined, had not the law of God convinced him thereof. This is so clearly decided in the 7th chapter of the epistle to the Romans, that if men were not extremely unwilling to admit any imputation of blame upon themselves, where they have the least shadow of an excuse, it could never have been made a question among Christians. That it is not actual transgression, but rather that which moves us to the commission thereof, the original depravity and proneness of our nature to evil, that the apostle is there speaking of, is plain from his own expressly distinguishing between the two. The one he speaks of as the cause, the other as the effect; the one is represented as the source, the other as the streams

* See Rhet. Exam. Armin. p. 314.

which flow from the fountain. "The motions of sins," says he, vers. 5. "which were by the law, did work in our members, to bring forth fruit unto death." Here we have something that moves and works in us, and something else that is the deadly fruit produced thereby. Again, vers. 11. "Sin," says he, "taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me." Actual transgression is not the cause of our being deceived, but the effect thereof. The same distinction between cause and effect is evidently preserved through the whole discourse, particularly in vers. 23. "But I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members." But is this law in his members, those motions which work, and bring forth evil fruit, is this fatal source of our actual transgressions itself innocent? On the contrary, is it not through the whole context called sin? These motions are the motions of sins, vers. 5.; it is *sin* that took occasion by the commandment, vers. 8. & 11.; it is *sin*, and no good thing, that dwelleth in us, even in our flesh, vers. 17. 18. & 20.; it is the law of *sin* which is in our members, and which we serve with the flesh, vers. 23. & 25.: and that which is all along so denominated, is what men are not easily apt to admit a conviction of the sinfulness of, though the law of God makes it unquestionable. Nay, says the apostle, vers. 7. "I had not known *sin*, but by the law; for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet." Nay, he does not satisfy himself with representing it as sinful only, but as exceedingly so, vers. 13. "Was then that which is good, made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful." And indeed, how much soever the thing may be overlooked, it is certain, that a constant, habitual propensity to that which is wrong, must have more of moral evil in it than any particular or single instance even of very gross actual transgression.

2. Another irrefragable proof of the moral evil of concupiscence may be taken from the prohibition of it

in the scripture, and the express injunctions that are laid upon us to mortify it : “ Mortify therefore,” says the apostle, “ your members which are upon the earth, (not “ only) fornication, uncleanness, (but) inordinate affection and evil concupiscence *.” And in the following verse he tells us, that these things render us children of disobedience, and expose us to God’s wrath : “ For which things sake the wrath of God cometh on “ the children of disobedience †.” Can that be innocent which is disobedience to God, and deserves his wrath ? In perfect conformity to this, the same apostle represents the lusts of our flesh, and the fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, as what renders us N. B. by nature the children of wrath, even as others ‡. The desires of the flesh, is, in the Greek, *τα δειλήματα*, the wills, and imputed to the mind, as well as the flesh ; which shows, that it is an act of the will, and not merely a bodily appetite, as hunger or thirst. A man may feel the appetites of hunger and thirst, while at the same time, influenced by other motives, he positively wills not to taste meat or drink ; in which case, the mere bodily appetite can never be imputed as a moral evil, though in circumstances where the indulgence of it would be ever so criminal. But here, it is plain, the mind itself is infected ; and the concupiscence, which renders us by nature children of wrath, is an act of the will, and therefore unquestionably a moral evil. Are we not expressly commanded, “ Love not the world, neither the things that are in the “ world ? If any man love the world, the love of the “ Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, “ the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the “ pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the “ world ||.” “ I beseech you,” says the Apostle Peter, “ abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the “ soul **.” We are required, not only to live soberly, righteously, and godly, but likewise to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts ††. We are prohibited to live in

* Col. iii. 5.

|| 1 John, ii. 15. 16.

† Col. iii. 6.

** 1 Pet. ii. 11.

‡ Eph. ii. 3.

†† Tit. ii. 12.



the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles, which know not God *. And, to add no more, says the same apostle, "Walk in the spirit, and ye shall not fulfil (or, as it is in the margin, fulfil ye not) the lust of the flesh †." Is it possible to reconcile the innocence of our carnal appetites, as they are in every man by nature, with such express injunctions to mortify them, and so many declarations of the sinfulness of them? Would it be a proper subject of a divine command to extinguish such mere bodily appetites as are independent of our wills, such as hunger or thirst? and yet the lusts we are to mortify are in every man by nature, and supposed, in the passage last quoted, to subsist still even where the spirit lusts against the flesh ‡; though at the same time it is certain, that, as the Apostle John observes, they are not of the Father, but of the world.

3. We may argue from the nature of the thing itself. What other measure have we whereby to judge of the sinfulness of any thing, but the law of God? Whatever is conformable to that law is morally good: on the other hand, sin is not only a transgression of, but a want of conformity to, the law of God. So the Apostle John defines it: "Sin is the transgression of the law ||," *ανομία*, a want of conformity to it, as the original word properly signifies. This is, by the Apostle Paul, stated in opposition to righteousness, when he says, What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? *δικαιοσύνη & ανομία* **. And our Saviour expressly mentions it as the ground of the damnation of wicked men at the day of judgement, that they are workers of that which wants conformity to the law, *εργαζομενοι την ανομιαν* ††. Now, what greater disconformity can there be to that law which is the measure of moral good, than a constant habitual aversion from God, and inclination to sense? The first and great commandment in the law is, to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our

* 1 Thess. iv. 5.

|| 1 John, iii. 4.

† Gal v. 16.

** 2 Cor. vi. 14.

‡ Gal. v. 17.

†† Matth. vii. 23.

mind *. It commands us to set our affection on things above, not on things on the earth †. And the contrary disposition is represented as a spiritual adultery, giving to another what is due only to God; which is the comprehensive sum of moral evil, and the real source of all wickedness. Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God ‡. And the Apostle Paul asserts, that this inclination to sense, as it is enmity against God, so it is a downright opposition or contrariety to the law; because the carnal mind, *το φρονημα της σαρκος*, the inclination of the flesh, is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be ||. From whence he justly infers, that it is displeasing to God, and exposes us to condemnation: So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God; and again, To be carnally minded is death **.

If, after such express testimonies of scripture, in concurrence with the reason and nature of the thing itself, it could be of any weight to adduce authorities of a lower kind, I might observe, that this is the constant and uniform doctrine of all the Protestant churches, in opposition to the Papists; and that not in the private writings of particular divines only, but in their public confessions, which all the clergy do subscribe, and consequently is universally professed and believed by all that are honest in such subscriptions. The church of England is very explicit in the 9th article. “Original sin
“standeth not in the following of Adam, (as the Pelagians do vainly talk), but it is the fault or corruption
“of the nature of every man that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam, whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his
“own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth
“always contrary to the spirit, and therefore in every
“person born into the world it deserveth God’s wrath
“and damnation: and this infection of nature doth re-

* Matth. xxii. 37. 38.

|| Rom. viii. 7.

† Col. iii. 2.

** Rom. viii. 8. 6.

‡ James, iv. 4.

“ main, yea in them that are regenerated, whereby the
 “ lust of the flesh, called in Greek *θρηνμα σαρκος*, which
 “ some do expound the wisdom, some sensuality, some
 “ the affection, some the desire of the flesh, is not sub-
 “ ject to the law of God. And though there is no con-
 “ demnation for them that believe and are baptised, yet
 “ the apostle doth confess, That concupiscence and lust
 “ hath of itself the nature of sin.” The French church
 is as explicit in the 11th article of her Confession: “ We
 “ believe that this stain of original sin is sin indeed;
 “ for it hath that mischievous power in it as to con-
 “ demn all mankind, even infants that are unborn,
 “ as yet in their mother’s womb, and God himself doth
 “ account it such; yea, and that even after baptism, as
 “ to the filth thereof, it is always sin.” To the same
 purpose the Palatine church, in their Catechism, which
 has been so well received among all the reformed, ad-
 opted and approven in the synod of Dort, a sort of ge-
 neral council of the reformed churches, “ Q. Num
 “ Deus hanc contumaciam et defectionem hominis di-
 “ mittit impunitam? R. Imo vero horrendis modis i-
 “ rascitur, tum ob innata nobis peccata, tum ob ea
 “ quæ ipsi committimus, eaque, justissimo judicio, præ-
 “ sentibus et æternis suppliciis punit; sicut ipse pronun-
 “ ciat, Maledictus omnis qui non permanet in omni-
 “ bus quæ scripta sunt in libro legis, ut faciat ea.” In
 like manner the Dutch, art. 15. of their Confession,
 “ Credimus Adami inobedientia peccatum originis in
 “ totum genus humanum diffusum fuisse; quod est to-
 “ tius naturæ corruptio, et vitium hæreditarium: quo
 “ et ipsi infantes in matris suæ utero polluti sunt, quod-
 “ que velut radix, omne peccatorum genus in homine
 “ producit: ideoque ita frædum et execrabile est coram
 “ Deo, ut ad generis humani condemnationem suffi-
 “ ciat.” To all these I shall only add the words of our
 Confession, ch. 6. art. 5. where, speaking of the origi-
 nal corruption of our nature, it is said, “ both itself,
 “ and all the motions thereof, are truly and properly
 “ sin.” And art. 6. “ Every sin, both original and
 “ actual, being a transgression of the righteous law of
 “ God, and contrary thereunto, doth, in its own na-

“ ture, bring guilt upon the sinner, whereby he is bound over to the wrath of God,” &c.

I am persuaded no Protestant will have any scruple in yielding, that a habitual aversion to God, and inclination to sense, is a moral evil, and a very great one too; and therefore those who think our fathers have gone too far in the above articles of their confessions, must be of opinion, that infants who die in their infancy have not in this life been at all in a state of moral agency, or capable of inclinations or aversions that have any moral good or evil, or that are either rewardable or punishable.

This opinion, though I dare say it is thought by those who entertain it to be for the advantage of children, does certainly exclude them absolutely from the rank of rational creatures. If it puts them out of danger of the misery which rational creatures that have been morally evil in this life are liable to in the next, it must, at the same time, cut off all hopes of their being intitled to the happiness of such as have been morally good. It is scarcely conceivable, or rather it is almost a contradiction in terms, to suppose an accountable creature, who is to be eternally happy or miserable, according to his moral character, to suppose such a one no moral agent in the state of trial or probation, and that his rationality, or capacity of moral agency, does not commence till the state of retribution is begun.

Upon what grounds can so irrational a procedure be fixed upon the great ruler and judge of the world? Can any man pretend to remember so exactly the state of his own faculties in the earliest moments of his life, can any one pretend to have so deep an insight into the minds of other children, who have not the use of speech, and are absolute strangers to all the objects that surround them, as to afford the data that are necessary to support an opinion which ascribes so very odd a conduct to the supreme being? That the youngest infants have ideas, that they are pleased with some, and displeased with others, that they have desires and aversions, is obvious to the most superficial observer. As for the great ignorance of and inattention to God and spiritual things which we find in most of them as soon

as they have language to converse with us, this, instead of being admitted as a proof of their natural incapacity, is only an evidence of their moral corruption, and has been already accounted for upon this supposition *. I say only the most of them; because it is an undeniable fact, that as there are some who are sanctified from the womb, so there have been instances of children who have given the earliest indications of a relish for divine things, and a ready apprehension of them, that is far from being common to the bulk of the species.

It is true, that in the earliest period of their life they are not capable of any actions that are rewardable or punishable by men, nor is it possible to have any distinct communication of ideas between them and the adult; and this may perhaps be the chief reason for excluding them out of the species of rational creatures. But surely the tribunal of men and the tribunal of God are by no means to be put upon the same footing, nor is the cognisance of the one equally extensive with that of the other. Though outward actions are the only objects of human judgement, it is an indisputable truth, that the judgement of God, like his all comprehensive view, reaches to the most inward thoughts, and the most unheeded dispositions of the soul. Though our Saviour hath assured us, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart †, and so is judged and regarded by God as a breaker of his law; yet if no overt act is committed in consequence thereof, it is a sin without the sphere of human judicature. While only sensible injuries done to our neighbour can justly expose one to be punished by his fellow-creatures, it is certain, that whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer in the sight of God; and we know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him ‡. In like manner, however remote from the cognisance or judgement of men the wrong inclinations and aversions of children may be, this can never exempt them from the cognisance and the judgement of him who made them what they are, and endowed them with such a degree of rational powers as he

* See p. 34.

† Matth. v. 28.

‡ John, iii. 15.

knows to be consistent with the rank of an accountable nature.

As, on the one hand, the little knowledge we have of the degree of understanding and power of the will in the youngest infants, cannot possibly furnish us with proofs that they are incapable of any thing that is morally evil, or has the nature of sin; so, on the other hand, the scripture furnishes us with the clearest and strongest evidence that they certainly are. And this being a point so essential in the present question, it may be worth our while to ponder the following arguments from scripture-revelation, which, in my apprehension, put this essential point beyond all controversy.

1. It is certain, that in fact sin, or moral evil, is imputed in the scripture to the very youngest infants, even while in their mother's womb, and before they can be supposed to have committed any actual transgression, or to be capable of any thing else that is morally good or evil, but that habitual wrong bias of their inclination which has been mentioned, with that ignorance of God which is the consequence thereof. There cannot be a clearer and a stronger proof of the possibility of any thing than the actual existence of it; and therefore, if God in the scripture calls this wrong bias in the youngest infants sin, and expresses his displeasure at it, undoubtedly they must be moral agents, and capable of moral evil. We do not call a lion or a wolf *sinners*, because we do not regard them as moral agents; but if God should express his displeasure at the rapaciousness of the one, and the fierceness of the other, and impute it to them as a moral evil, we would certainly have ground to account them moral agents.

The scripture, however, affords abundant instances of sin being ascribed to the youngest infants. "Behold," says David, "I was shapen in iniquity: and in sin did my mother conceive me *." Nothing can go beyond this in point of time. The period mentioned by the penitent Psalmist is that of his very formation in the womb of his mother, where he was warmed and

* Ps. li 5.

cherished, as the original word, which we render conceive, properly signifies; and yet, in a humble review of his life, and a penitent acknowledgement of his own sinfulness, he plainly ascribes iniquity and sin to that early period of his existence. Vain are the evasions whereby Pelagian writers would elude the force of this testimony, as if the sin here mentioned was the sin of his mother, or as if David intended, not to aggravate, but to extenuate his guilt, by pleading his natural propensity, or a sort of physical necessity of the crimes he had committed. [To both these contradictory evasions Volkeliuſ has recourse.] For it is plain, that in this psalm the penitent author, now brought to a deep contrition and humiliation, is far from extenuating or excusing his own guilt, by throwing the blame of his wicked practices from himself either upon God, or upon any one else, which would be very inconsistent with that profound humility, that shame and contrition, which God requires of a true penitent, according to the Psalmist's own observation in the 17th verse of the psalm. On the contrary, he rather endeavours to affect his soul with a sense of his own enormous guilt, and abases himself before God, in self-condemnation, justifying God in all the severity which he had exercised, or might exercise, against him upon that account. With this view, he ascends from the filthy streams to the polluted fountain from whence they flowed, and humbles himself with self-abasement before God, in the consideration of the wickedness of his nature, which he had even in his mother's belly: As if one, expressing the bad opinion he had of wolves, as an argument for their destruction, after they had worried some of his lambs, should say, It is not this single instance only that moves me; but I know them to be of a rapacious nature, even when whelps, before they have strength enough to do mischief. Upon this penitent sense and confession of the inward depravity of his nature, which had discovered itself by such gross outbreakings, is founded the whole petitory part of his prayer. "Wash
" me thoroughly, cleanse me. Thou desirest truth in
" the *inward* parts. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall
" be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

“ Create in me a *clean heart*; renew a right spirit within me.” But if the Psalmist had considered this original wickedness of his nature as a thing that was no fault of his, no moral evil, but an effect of a purely physical necessity, and himself as at that time no moral agent, he might have called it something else, but he could not have called it sin, nor had we met with it at all in a penitent and self-abasing confession of his own wickedness.

It is not only David in a penitent confession, but God himself, that looks upon this original bias of the inclination in all mankind, even the youngest infants, as a moral evil, and highly displeasing to him. Moses tells us, God saw that the wickedness of men was great in the earth, and that *every* imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil *continually* *. Besides the universality of the expressions here used, we may observe, that this is said, not of any particular persons, but of the whole species without exception, and that it is given as the reason why God saw fit to destroy the world by a flood; a punishment which extended not to adult sinners only, but involved the youngest infants in the penal desolation. And they are still more expressly mentioned in the gracious promise, that he would not again smite *every* living thing; for, or though, as some render it, the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth †. The word rendered from his youth, signifies the earliest infancy; for the Jewish writers in explaining it tell us, the period comprehended in it commences with the first motion of the child in the belly. And indeed the use of the word in other places of scripture justifies this interpretation, as when the angel gave directions to Samson’s mother to drink no wine nor strong drink when she was going with him; for, says he, the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the *womb* ‡. The word is the same that in Genesis is rendered from his youth. Other passages might be quoted to the same purpose, particularly Ezekiel, xvi. 22. Thou hast not remembered the days of thy youth, when thou wast naked and bare,

* Gen. vi. 5.

† Gen. viii. 21.

‡ Judges, xiii. 5.

and wast polluted in thy blood. Now when was it that she was naked, and bare, and polluted? We are told in the 4th verse, And as for thy nativity in the day thou wast born, thy navel was not cut, neither wast thou washed, &c. So that by youth we are to understand the earliest infancy. And yet that period of our life it seems is capable of moral evil. And hence sinners are called transgressors from the womb *, and the wicked are said to be estranged from the womb †.

So far is the scripture from supposing the very youngest infants incapable of moral evil, that the contrary is not only asserted, but it is represented as a most incredible absurdity to imagine them free from it. Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one ‡. And again, How can he be clean that is born of a woman ||? Now, either infants are not born of a woman, are not brought out of an unclean thing, or they must themselves be unclean. But what sort of pollution is ascribed to them? Can it be only a corporal uncleanness? The context does so evidently limit the sense to a moral pollution, that the most obstinate Socinian or Pelagian cannot deny it. And, can there be moral evil in any thing that is not a moral agent? Is this what can be predicated of any thing that is an act of the creator, or an effect of his established laws? or indeed of any thing that is not an act of an accountable creature's will?

The doctrine of the New Testament is the same with that of the Old. Our Saviour assures us, That which is born of the flesh, is flesh **. Where the context makes it obvious, that by being born of the flesh is meant our natural generation, and, by being flesh, such a moral corruption as incapacitates us for future happiness. And the Apostle Paul tells us, That the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the believing wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the believing husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy ††. Not that the children, even of believing parents, are originally holy; but the promise being unto them and

* Is. xlvi. 8.

|| Job, xxv. 4.

† Ps. lviii. 3.

** John, iii. 6.

‡ Job, xiv. 4.

†† 1 Cor. vii. 14.

to their children *, they are therefore federally holy, or intitled to the promise of sanctification by the spirit in the covenant of grace; not aliens or strangers from the covenant of promise, which the others are. But what kind of uncleanness is ascribed to the children of unbelieving parents? Can it be any other than a moral one?

I shall only mention one passage more; and indeed it is absolutely decisive. "By one man, says the same apostle, sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned. For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression †." Here not only all are declared to have sinned without exception, but particularly all who die, as it is certain many do, in their infancy; which cannot be true, if infants are incapable of sin, or not moral agents. Nay, death is said to be passed upon all, for that all have sinned: and as if the apostle were apprehensive that these general terms did not sufficiently include infants, he makes a particular application of what he had said to them in a special manner in the 14th verse, distinguishing, in the most explicit terms, between original sin and actual transgression, and observing, that death reigned even over them that had not sinned after the *similitude* of Adam's transgression, but had been guilty of original sin only. And as sin cannot be imputed, or there cannot be any such thing as sin but in moral agents that are subject to a law; so the youngest infants, whose death is a demonstration that they are sinners, must of consequence be moral agents that are subject to the law of nature, even before the revealed law was given by Moses. So that every point of this question is clearly decided in this passage.

2. Not only is sin, or moral evil, imputed to children in the scripture, but to suppose them entirely free from, or incapable of it, would be contrary to the analogy of faith, and inconsistent with the most essential doctrines of Christianity. Nothing can be imagined more essen-

* Acts, ii. 39.

† Rom. v. 12. 13. 14.

tial to, or of more importance in revealed religion, than the doctrine of the salvation or redemption of all mankind by the death of Christ, and of the necessity of their regeneration by the Holy Ghost, and the doctrine of the sacraments of baptism under the New, and circumcision under the Old Testament. All Christians, and particularly infants, are baptised in the name, not only of the Father, as their Creator, but of the Son, as their Redeemer, and of the Holy Ghost, as their Sanctifier; which would be extremely absurd, if they had no occasion either for the propitiatory merits of the one, or the sanctifying influences of the other.

It would be so new a doctrine among Christians, that the most violent opposers of original sin have not ventured upon it to maintain, that infants who die without having committed any actual transgression, are excluded out of the number of those for whom Christ died, who is the Saviour of all men *, and who tasted death for every man †. Christ himself, when little children were presented to him as the Saviour, and his disciples opposed it, said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me; for of such is the kingdom of heaven ‡. And we know the promise of the covenant of grace is not only unto believers, but also to their children ||; their children, who by virtue of their believing are holy, but otherwise unclean **.

Now, what sort of persons are they for whom Christ died? Are they absolutely free from sin, and such as had no guilt at all to be expiated? Even though they had not been called unclean, may we not justly infer, with the apostle, that if one died for *all*, then were *all* dead ††? They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick ‡‡. The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost |||. Christ Jesus came into the world to save *sinners* +. And his name was called Jesus, because he saves his people from their *sins* ++. He was wounded for *our transgressions*, he was bruised for *our iniquities*. All we like sheep have gone

* 1 Tim. iv. 10.

|| Acts, ii. 39.

‡‡ Matth. ix. 14.

++ Matth. i. 21.

† Heb. ii. 9.

** 1 Cor. vii. 14.

||| Luke, xix. 10.

‡ Matth. xix. 14.

†† 2 Cor. v. 14.

+ 1 Tim. i. 15.

astray : we have turned every one to his own way ; and the Lord hath laid on him the *iniquity* of us *all* *. He gave himself a *ransom* for *all* †, that we should not perish, and that the *world* through him might be *saved* ‡. He is the *Saviour* of the body, the church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and *cleanse* it with the washing of water, that it might not have *spot* or *wrinkle* ||. When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the *ungodly*. While we were yet *sinners*, Christ died for us. We were *justified* by his blood. When we were *enemies*, we were *reconciled* to God by the death of his Son **. How can they be reconciled to God, who were not at enmity with him ? how can they be saved, who were not in a perishing condition ? or healed, who were not sick ? redeemed or ransomed, who were in no bondage or thralldom ?

In short, either some infants are saved, or they are not. If not, either they perish as brutes, and have not rational and immortal souls, (which I believe none will presume to say, especially when the scripture has so expressly told us that the promise extends to them) ; or they live in misery, and so must have had sin that did deserve it. If any of them are saved, it is either by covenant, or without it ; either there is some promise for it, or there is none. If none, upon what ground can we presume to say that any of them are saved ? For who hath known the mind of the Lord, without his revelation ? or can tell what he will do to them, without arrogance ? But if a revelation or promise be pled, it is either the covenant of nature, or of grace. It cannot be the first, which is acknowledged, by all who believe there was such a covenant, to be now broken and abrogated, and is expressly declared to be so in the scripture. If by the covenant of grace, which is the only way of salvation revealed in the Bible, and which is expressly declared by the Apostle Peter to extend to infants, then their salvation cannot be of justice, but of free grace, and pure undeserved mercy, being by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is

* If *hiii.* 5. 6.

|| *Eph.* v. 25.

† *1 Tim.* ii. 6.

** *Rom.* v. 6. 8. 9. 10.

‡ *John.* *hiii.* 16. 17.

rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sin, hath quickened us together with Christ: by grace ye are saved *. For, as the same apostle observes, there is none righteous, no not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. And therefore, in order to salvation in the gospel-method, every mouth must be stopped, and *all* the world become guilty before God: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ †. For by the works of the law shall *no flesh* be justified. For if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain ‡. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for the just shall live by faith. And the law is not of faith; but the man that doth them, shall live in them. Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us. If there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the scripture hath concluded *all* under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe ||.

To say that the death of Christ, though it could not procure for infants the pardon of guilt which cannot be justly imputed to them, may, however, be of some use in purchasing for them a degree of happiness which they do not deserve, is not only representing the death of Christ in a very different light from that in which the scripture constantly represents it, viz. as a vicarious punishment, a sacrifice, a ransom, a propitiation, &c.; but it proceeds from a mistake of the reason and end of Christ's death. Christ, by his death, has indeed purchased heaven for us; and it was so indispensably necessary for this purpose, that, without the intervention thereof, it would not have been consistent with the wisdom, holiness, and justice of God, to have bestowed upon us any degree of happiness. Not but that God is at perfect liberty to make innocent creatures as happy

* Eph. ii. 3. 4. 5.

† Gal. ii. 16. 21.

‡ Rom. iii. 10. 11. 19. 23. 24.

|| Gal. iii. 11. 12. 13. 21. 22.

as he pleases, without any price being paid to him for the purchase. But in our case, the guilt of sinners being a mighty bar against the exercise of his goodness, it was this impediment which the sacrifice of Christ removed out of the way; and thus eternal life is the gift of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord *: whereas, if infants be perfectly innocent, there could have been no occasion for a vicarious sufferer on their account, in order to open a way for the exercise of infinite beneficence towards them in any degree.

Again, if infants be perfectly innocent, and have nothing in them of moral evil, where can be the necessity of that regeneration, or renovation of their natures, which our Saviour represents as one of the most important doctrines of Christianity? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God †. And is it not strange, that after our Saviour's rebuke to Nicodemus, there are still masters of Israel that do not, or will not, know these things? We cannot suppose God to create a soul so, that, without any fault of its own, it needs to be new formed again, or regenerated, created by a new workmanship in Christ Jesus unto good works ‡. But if those who have only been born into the world in the natural way would be excluded from happiness, should they die ever so early, without a renovation of their nature, as we are here assured from the very best authority, must they not certainly have contracted some moral pollution? and, consequently, must they not be moral agents, and capable of moral evil? Can there be any faults to mend in God's own workmanship, but what are owing to some act of the creature itself? yet there is not an individual of the human race, but before it comes out of the mother's womb is rendered unfit for, and incapable of, the heavenly happiness. For, that which is born of the flesh, says our Saviour, is flesh ||; i. e. (not physically, to be sure, but) morally polluted. Is it possible to conceive this, without a culpable act of its own will? Upon this supposition, indeed, the ne-

* Rom. vi. 23.

† John, iii. 3.

‡ Eph. ii. 10.

|| John, iii. 6. See Calv. Inst. l. 4. c. 16. n. 19 20.

ceffity of being born again is obvious ; but otherwise, utterly incomprehensible.

Even admitting that none who are once born in the natural way were to die in their infancy, but all were to live till they became capable of actual transgression ; yet where can be the necessity of regeneration upon the principles of our opponents ? If an infant is not a moral agent ; if a physical necessity to commit actual transgression be a contradiction, as it obviously is to all who understand the terms ; and if a moral necessity essentially implies exceptions, and cannot be universal ; may not some of the human race, at least, be supposed to stand in no need of any change of their nature ? How can it be said, that if *any* man be in Christ, he is a new creature : old things are past away ; behold *all* things are become *new* * ? How can it be the indispensable duty of *all* to put off the old man, with his deeds, and to put on the *new* man, which is renewed in knowledge, after the image of him that created him † ? to put off the old man, which is corrupt, according to the deceitful lusts ; and be renewed in the spirit of their mind ; and put on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness ‡ ? to be transformed by the renewing of their mind || ? How comes it to be the character of true Christians, that they are buried with Christ by baptism into death ; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in *newness* of life ; the old man being crucified with Christ, that the body of sin might be destroyed, as those that are alive from the dead ** ?

This last passage is evidently an allusion to baptism ; and indeed the doctrine of the two initiating sacraments must either be razed out of our creed, and even out of the Bible, or the concern of the youngest infants in our redemption through the blood of Christ, and regeneration by his Spirit, must be admitted ; consequently, that they are capable of moral pollution. And I would

* 2 Cor. v. 17.

|| Rom. xii. 2.

† Col. iii. 9. 10.

** Rom. vi. 4. 6. 13.

‡ Eph. iv. 22. 23. 24.

fain know how this can be, if they be not moral agents.

To be baptised, plainly implies an interest in the death of Christ : Know ye not, says the apostle, that so many of us as were baptised into Jesus Christ, were baptised into his death *? And again, For as many of you as have been baptised into Christ, have put on Christ †. This is adduced as a proof that our salvation is not a thing that is due to us in justice, but what we owe to pure grace and mercy, that the inheritance is not of the law, but of promise ‡. But the scripture, says the apostle, hath concluded *all* under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe ||. And indeed baptism can have no meaning, if it does not imply the guilt and the moral pollution of those to whom it is administered. Washing always supposes filth ; but surely, as the Apostle Peter observes, baptism doth not save us by putting away the filth of the *flesh* **. It is the blood of Christ which is signified by the water in baptism ; and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin ††. It is the remission of sin, therefore, and regeneration, that is signified and sealed in this sacrament : Be baptised, says Peter, for the remission of sins ; for the promise is unto you, and to your children ‡‡. And says Ananias to Paul, Arise, and be baptised, and wash away thy *sins* |||. It is likewise called the washing of regeneration +. And we are said to be buried with Christ in baptism, wherein also we are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead ++.

I have in this argument taken for granted the baptism of infants, having to do with such as admit and practise infant baptism, who therefore must allow that guilt and moral uncleanness, which is supposed and signified in that ordinance, to be imputed to them. But it cannot be denied, that infants, by divine appointment, were circumcised ; and the very same things were

* Rom. vi 3.

|| Gal. iii. 22.

†† Acts, ii. 38. 39.

++ Col. ii. 12.

† Gal. iii. 27.

** 1 Pet. iii. 21.

||| Acts, xxii. 16.

‡ Gal. iii. 18.

†† 1 John, i. 7.

+ Tit. iii. 5.

signified and sealed in that sacrament likewise, viz. regeneration, and the pardon of sin, and that through grace. So the apostle expressly declares: And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised *. And what that righteousness of faith was, is evident in the whole context: It is a justification of the ungodly †; a reward, not reckoned of debt, but of grace ‡. It is a pardon of sin: Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered ||. The cutting off the foreskin represented the impurity of their nature, and the necessity of an expiation of their guilt by the shedding of blood, and of the mortification of the flesh, and the putting away of those vices which the circumcised were supposed liable to. In whom also, says the apostle, ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ. And you being dead in your sins, and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses **. Is it possible to reconcile the perfect innocence of infants with the institution of such an ordinance for them, or with the necessity of their redemption through the blood of Christ, and of their regeneration by the Holy Spirit? And if they be guilty polluted sinners, must they not, by the most necessary consequence, undoubtedly be moral agents?

3 All this will yet appear still more manifest, if we consider, that the very youngest infants are liable to the punishment of sin. The supreme ruler of the world treats them as sinners, by inflicting upon them sometimes excruciating pains and diseases, and even death itself, whereby the agreeable union between soul and body is violently dissolved, the body turned into loathsome dust, and the state of trial which the soul was put into finally ended. We cannot form our judgement by a

* Rom. iv. 11.

|| Rom. iv. 6. 7.

† Rom. iv. 5.

** Col. ii. 11. 13.

‡ Rom. iv. 4.

more unerring rule than this; for we may be assured, that so infinitely just a being as God cannot but treat every thing as it is; and so infinitely good a being can never be supposed wantonly to inflict grievous pains and penalties upon perfectly innocent creatures, the workmanship of his own hands, that were formed for the most exquisite happiness, in the eternal enjoyment of himself; and therefore, if in fact it is certain, that he treats them as sinners, there cannot be a surer ground upon which to conclude that they are so. If man be born to trouble as the sparks fly upward, although affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground *, we may safely infer, that he is born in sin. For, under the government of so holy and perfect a being as God, it is a maxim that admits of no exception, That sin and misery, innocence and happiness, are inseparable in rational creatures. And indeed we have Job going before us, in drawing this very inference, Man that is born of a woman is of few days and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not. And what does he infer from this? Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one †.

The reply that is made to this argument, if I take it right, is to this purpose: That as our being itself is the free gift of God, the most innocent creature can have no reason to complain, if, taking the whole duration of his existence together, he has more happiness than misery: That therefore it cannot be inconsistent with the perfections of God to let infants, however perfectly innocent, suffer the pain, and even death itself, which is the necessary consequence of their being children of sinners, as he has it in his power to overbalance all their temporal sufferings, were they more and greater than they are, by eternal happiness in the other world; and therefore it is argued, that the direct contrary inference may be drawn from the pains, and miseries, and death of infants; not that they are sinners, but that such of them as die in their infancy will be eternally

* Job, v. 6. 7.

† Job, xiv. 1. 2. 4.

happy in the future state. This seems to be necessary, in the apprehension of the objectors, to vindicate the justice and goodness of God. Upon this supposition, all the misery that short-lived infants are capable of in this life bears so trifling a proportion to the whole of their existence, and is so bountifully compensated by the exquisite and everlasting happiness of the other world, that it is not worth the mentioning; whereas the inflicting upon them, not only temporal misery, but eternal damnation too, for what was not in their power to avoid, seems to be such an impeachment of the divine justice as the objectors are extremely unwilling to admit.

It is obvious at first view, that the whole strength of this reply consists entirely in begging the question, and taking the most material points in dispute for granted, viz. that nothing is sin, or morally evil, but actual transgression; and that moral impotence is inconsistent with free agency, or imputation of guilt; both of which are denied; and the reasons of this denial have already been given. And even admitting both these suppositions, the present misery of infants is no otherwise accounted for, but by a third supposition, of their eternal happiness, the very thing in dispute, at least in so far as it is put on the footing of justice. What God in fact will do, in his great mercy through Christ, is not now the question. And when even this last supposition itself is admitted, though it may lessen, yet it is evident it does not entirely remove, the difficulty which must still arise from even the temporary misery of innocents. Suppose we discerned, at some distance, a child beaten by his parent, of whose wisdom, justice, good nature, and love to his children, we had the highest esteem; would it not be a very natural inference, that surely the child had committed some fault, even though we had no other ground whatever to suspect it? which, by the way, is far from being the present case. And would it be thought just reasoning to alledge, that the boy, for all that, may be perfectly innocent, and the father the same good man we took him to be too; because the fine estate he was to leave him at the last was more than sufficient to compensate all the pain he could suffer in his

younger years? But, to be more particular, this account of the matter labours under two disadvantages: it is inconsistent, 1st, with the scripture-account, and, 2dly, with the nature of the thing.

1. The scripture will not admit of any such reply; for there the point is expressly decided, that death is the *wages of sin* *; that *sin* hath reigned unto death †; and not only that death entered by sin, but that the reason why death passed upon all men is, For that all have sinned ‡, even they who have not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression ||. And indeed the whole circumstances of the dismal catastrophe, not only the unnatural divorce itself that is made between soul and body, and the period it puts to the state of trial, but the pain and sickness that ushers in the king of terrors, and the loathsome corruption that follows at his heels, which reduces the body to its dust; all looks so like punishment, and the divine displeasure, that it is not easy to conceive otherwise of the matter. And God has given us two instances, viz. Enoch and Elijah, to show that he is by no means limited to any one method of taking Adam's posterity out of the world. Besides, it is certain, that the untimely death of many infants, so far from being the necessary effect of the present constitution of human nature, has been directly inflicted by the immediate hand of God himself, as a punishment of sin; particularly in the cases of the flood, and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Nay, God has sometimes expressly commanded this punishment to be executed by men upon the infants of such as have been more than ordinarily corrupted. While the children of other enemies to the Israelites were appointed to be spared, they are expressly required to put those of the devoted nations of Canaan to a violent death, to destroy infant and suckling, and to save alive nothing that breatheth **. Is there any appearance here of what the objectors would have to be taken for granted, that the pain and death of infants is an unintended consequence of the present constitution, that was settled with another view;

* Rom. vi. 23.

|| Rom. v. 14.

† Rom. v. 21.

** Deut. xx 16.; 1 Sam. xv. 3.

‡ Rom. v. 12.

and that they were so far from being aimed at, that a compensation becomes due to them because of the accidental hurt which they undesignedly receive by the by ?

2. This hypothesis, (for more than an hypothesis it surely cannot pretend to be), as it is contrary to the scripture account of the matter, so it is inconsistent with the nature of the thing itself, and utterly unapplicable to the conduct of a perfect being. According to the objectors, God being provoked by a single individual only, who was soon to leave the stage to a numerous species, all of whom, for any thing that had happened, might be perfectly innocent, and many of whom actually are so, did, however, sling about his wrath at the undeserving, and settle a constitution so inadvertently, that the purest innocents are deeply involved in the penal effects, which brings, it seems, a sort of obligation upon God himself to compensate their losses. Having tasted nothing but misery in this life, and being, without so much as a trial of their moral dispositions, and even before they came to a state of moral agency, hurried directly into the state of retribution, the justice of God is now found to be debtor to them for the undeserved ill usage they have met with, and, whatever their characters may turn out to be, is now bound, by way of restitution, to bring matters to rights again, by an over-balance of happiness; and the opportunity being lost of putting them in a state of probation, there is no choice but an indispensable necessity, in point of justice, to put them into a state of unchangeable and everlasting happiness.

Now, let any one consider the matter in this light, which is the true and real amount of the objection in other words, and see whether it is possible for him to suppose the supreme being reduced to such a situation. Restitution is indeed a duty that is frequently incumbent upon us fallen sinners; and it is a beautiful part of a human character to perform it to the utmost, and to make all the compensation that lies in our power for any undeserved misery we have unhappily involved our fellow-creatures in: but then, like repentance, of which it is a branch, it always supposes a previous failure in

our conduct; and therefore is a duty peculiar to sinners, or beings of an imperfect character, and can never be supposed to lie as an obligation upon the supreme being. Restitution, or compensation, does, in the very notion of it, imply an injury, or some degree of misery, brought upon another, without any reason for it in the demerit of the sufferer, by the person who makes compensation. And accordingly this is indeed the very notion which the objectors would obtrude upon us in the present case. The death and sufferings of children, say they, are undeserved on their part; and therefore God himself is obliged in justice to make them a compensation. All they have to say in excuse for the injury is, that as, on the one hand, it was not directly intended, but an effect of a constitution settled for other reasons; so, on the other hand, it is but a small one, or of a short duration, and sufficiently balanced by the future happiness which they think may be depended on, because God, after what he has done, cannot withhold it without being unjust; never reflecting, that he cannot be under an obligation to bestow it, without having first acted below the perfection of his character. Extenuations of this kind might make a tolerable shift to vindicate the conduct of a man; but certainly God can never stand in need of them.

For, in the first place, to settle a constitution with a view to a single individual who was soon to be out of the way of it, without regard to the many millions of his posterity, who, by the hypothesis, could not deserve the evils in that constitution, must surely be such an acting at random, and with uncertainty at least, if not worse, as cannot be imputed to a being of infinite perfection. In the second place, I shall readily own, that an imperfect creature may sometimes be under a necessity to hurt those who do not deserve it, for want of ability to obtain his end any other way, and so be brought under an obligation of compensating their losses; but it will not follow, that the author of nature, and of all the laws of it, who is of infinite wisdom to foresee the consequences of things, and of infinite power to bring about any end by the properest means, can ever be reduced to the same necessity; not to insist now on the

instances formerly mentioned, of God himself inflicting death on infants, and directing others to do it, beyond the settled course of things. And, in the third place, to say that an injury is comparatively but small, and of short continuance, is an excuse that the best of men may perhaps sometimes need; but it is extremely unsuitable to him, who can no more do a small injury than a great one. An imperfect character may be measured by the excess of the good above the evil, or of the evil above the good; but in God there can be nothing but good; nor can he, at any period, ever treat any thing but as it is. He is not like those masters, whose unreasonable usage of their servants in a peevish fit, is the more patiently submitted to, because of the extraordinary liberality of their bounty upon the return of their good humour. The least degree of what is wrong is as incompatible with the character of God, as the highest degree of it, i. e. both of them utterly inconsistent therewith. Nor can the greatest happiness, and of the longest duration, conferred upon an innocent creature in the other world, change the nature of the usage they met with in this, or make it any thing else than some degree of temporary misery inflicted upon such as deserved none at all. This is what the goodness of God is at all times, and in any one moment, as well as another, equally incapable of, as being still what it is, let what will be afterward. The future can, by no right reasoning, be brought into the account. In so far as it is not revealed, it is utterly unknown to us; but if analogy affords us any rule of judgement, we must at least conclude, that those who are miserable here may without injustice be miserable hereafter. This is not presuming to judge what their future state shall be, or circumscribing the mercy of God, who has contrived a way of extending it to guilty sinners. It is only inferring from their present sufferings, what we are otherwise also sufficiently informed of, that their present state is undoubtedly a state of guilt; and that they certainly have deserved the misery which they now endure.

So promiscuous indeed is the distribution of happiness and misery in this world, that I readily allow

the inference to be just which is usually drawn from thence, viz. that there must be a future state, where it will be well only with the righteous, and ill only with the wicked. But this is no objection to the above reasoning : for where lies the difficulty in the present dispensations of Providence, that needs the supposition of a future state to clear it up ? Not surely in the undeserved misery of good men. No body that proceeds upon the scripture-plan can have the presumption to pretend this. But it lies entirely on the other side, the happiness in which wicked men are now indulged, or rather in the proportion of happiness and misery that is observed in the providential usage of both. As for good men, they are known to be but imperfectly so ; nay, the scripture assures us, that they are all guilty sinners. It hath concluded all under sin, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God. And therefore the present chastisement of good men is so far from being an instance of misery without sin, that it affords an example of the most wholesome correction and kindly-intended sufferings, presupposing sin as the true cause and foundation of them : and, instead of being beyond the demerit of the sufferers, they must be, and always are by them, acknowledged to be infinitely short of it. Good men may be at a loss how to account for the divine forbearance now exercised on the wicked, without having recourse to a day of judgement ; but as there is not a good man who is not sensible that he himself has deserved hell, he cannot but own, that any thing less than that is mercy.

I cannot help observing, upon this occasion, that the concern usually pretended, by the excusers of sin, for the moral character of God, is very much desiderated in this part of the controversy. The opposition made to these doctrines of religion which relate to the great evil and demerit of sin, in every kind or degree of it, with the severity and duration of its punishment, as represented in the Christian revelation, may arise from a twofold source. It may proceed either from a slight sense of the greatness of moral evil, or from a concern for the justice and goodness of God. There is no

doubt that all who are engaged in this opposition will impute it to the last of the two; and whatever may have been the real source of such opposition, or how low ideas soever the first opposers may have entertained of the demerit of sin, I make no question but the frightful pictures they have drawn of the cruelty and injustice there must be in the punishment of it, have made an impression upon many of their well meaning profelytes. Indeed such sort of topics must have more of declamation than argument in them; for the justice or injustice of a punishment depends entirely upon the demerit of the crime; and therefore here the stress of the reasoning must at length be brought. Those who are convinced of the great demerit of all sin, original or actual, and of the benevolent and extensive ends that may be obtained by the eternal punishment of it, are so far from thinking that there is either cruelty or injustice in it, that the contrary measure appears to them inconsistent, not only with the purity and holiness, but with the justice and goodness, of the great ruler of the world. And here lies the difference between the treatment we give, and the treatment they give, to the moral character of God. We maintain, universally and without exception, that God never does inflict the least degree of misery upon any of his creatures, but such as deserve it; and we are so much persuaded of the infinite goodness, justice, and mercy, of the supreme being, and so much convinced, that as he has no pleasure even in the death of a sinner, so he never can be under the least temptation to treat any thing otherwise than as it is, that the actual sufferings of any rational creature under his government, is a sufficient demonstration to us of the guilt and demerit of the sufferer: whereas our opponents, though the death and sufferings of infants are facts which they cannot deny, chuse rather to yield, that God inflicts some degree of misery upon perfect innocents, and thereby brings himself under an obligation to his own creatures, than to admit that they deserve it. Is there not some appearance here of a greater concern to ward off the imputation of blame from ourselves, than to vindicate the moral character of God?

Let us now take a review of the argument, and see whether clearer evidence can be had for any thing. Infants, it is alledged, are not moral agents, and incapable of either moral good or evil; and yet it is admitted, that many of them, without any farther capacity, are carried out of the state of trial into a state of eternal retribution. God, who must certainly know their capacities better than we can pretend to do, plainly charges them with sin and guilt. Can they be justly charged with it if they be incapable of it? This of itself might be sufficient, one should think, to satisfy all who allow that God is better acquainted with the capacities of his own creatures than we are. But how strong are the additional confirmations of this in every fact that occurs to us, in the dispensations both of nature and of grace? A circumstantial proof is thought to have in some respects the advantage even of a direct one, especially where the circumstances are numerous, and cannot otherwise be accounted for. Now what circumstance could be better adapted to support the truth of this accusation, than the treatment we do in fact see them liable to, as far as it falls within the compass of our observation? Is it possible to imagine a God of unerring justice to treat any thing otherwise than as it is? or a being of infinite goodness and mercy to inflict more misery upon any of his creatures than they deserve? And therefore, when we see them treated as sinners, how can we doubt that they are so? God has likewise declared his kind intentions with relation to the future happiness of some of them. But in what way? Upon the foot of justice? By no means; but by a covenant of grace. By giving his Son to be their Saviour, to be a ransom for their redemption, offering him up a sacrifice, to redeem them from the curse of the law, being made a curse for them. Is all this consistent with the supposition of their innocence? If it would be unjust to punish them, why has God been at such exorbitant expence to save them from it? Can all this be for no other reason but to prevent his own doing a notorious piece of injustice, or even to open the way for his conferring any degree of happiness he pleases upon any of his innocent creatures? But farther, he has not only

given his Son to redeem them, but his Spirit to sanctify them. He has declared, that none who was ever born of a woman can enter into the kingdom of God without a total change and renovation of their nature, by the operation of the Holy Ghost. Can this be needful in the case of perfect innocence, and where there has been no moral corruption or alteration of their nature since they came out of his own forming hands? Last of all, there have been two sacraments instituted for them by God himself, the signs and seals of that covenant of grace in which they are affirmed to be included, both of which do evidently suppose and represent a moral corruption of their natures, and were intended to ratify the promise of salvation to them through the blood of a Redeemer, and the regeneration of a Sanctifier, the expiation of their guilt, the mortification of corruption, and the washing them from moral pollution. Can this likewise be reconciled with their perfect innocence? If any one of these evidences would be sufficient, even in a separate view, to infer the conclusion, what must be the amount of the whole when all are laid together, and considered as concurring in support of one another?

But still, it seems, it is thought to be but a piece of common justice to give them at least a fair opportunity of trial, by letting their rational powers ripen into maturity before they are carried into a state of final retribution, if God does not intend them for happiness when they are carried off sooner. In the one case, should they neglect the opportunity, the fault would be their own, and they would justly suffer the penalty of their own folly, when they had it in their power to prevent it; whereas, in the other case, the weight of the odium seems to lie more upon God, who, to speak so, does not seem to have given them such fair play for eternity as the importance of the case requires.

This objection is founded upon the following grounds. First, it takes for granted, that the bad disposition wherein original sin consists is really no fault of ours; that infants are no moral agents, and are not really in a state of trial at all; which are the very points in controversy, and have been already discussed. Secondly, It is

founded upon the supposition, either that God is bound to assist all the adult with his grace, or that their own natural powers, when ripened into maturity, are sufficient of themselves to effect their conversion, or to perform a complete course of perfect obedience: neither of which I believe will be pretended. If the grace of God be a gift that is perfectly free, which he is under no obligation to bestow upon any man, and which in fact he sees fit to withhold from innumerable multitudes of men, and if without it none ever did or ever will comply with the condition of salvation, where can be the advantage of an infant, already infected with moral corruption, continuing longer in the world, to bring an additional load of guilt upon itself before it passes the final trial that is to determine its eternal state? On the contrary, are there not many a sinner whom God has seen fit, for wise reasons, to preserve in the world to an adult state, who to eternity will have cause to wish that they had died in their infancy, as in that case they would have appeared before the great tribunal with much less guilt upon them?

Whether the objectors will carry the matter all the length of the old Pelagians, and maintain, that the mere unassisted natural powers of Adam's posterity are sufficient for the purpose of salvation; or if it will be yielded, that all mankind are under a moral necessity of continuing sinners, without the assistance of that grace which God is not bound to give any man, and which it is obvious he withholds from millions; which of these two, I say, is the case, I shall not pretend to determine. If the last, as I incline to hope of a good many at least, let me ask, Is not every unregenerated adult person, who has continued in the world, and committed a great many actual transgressions, liable to a severer punishment, and a much higher degree of misery in the next life, than any infant who is carried out of the world with no more but original sin can be supposed by any body to be? Suppose such an infant, instead of dying so early, and comparatively with so light a load of guilt, preserved by God to old age, but the assistance of grace withheld from him, as it is from many others, till his evil habits, grown inveterate by repeated acts, and

irritated by the infectious examples and ensnaring temptations with which he is surrounded, has broke out into a thousand acts of wickedness, in spite of many warnings and rebukes of God's word and providence; can such preservation be really thought a more kind and favourable treatment of him than an early death in his infant state? And may not the death of every unregenerated infant be kindly and mercifully intended by God for the prevention of that greater degree of sin and of misery, which he foresees the indulging him with a farther opportunity would involve him in? How can God's putting a period to the probationary state of any under one degree of sin and misery be more inconsistent with his moral character, than the permitting that degree to increase to a thousand?

But in case it should not be yielded that *all* the posterity of Adam, without the assistance of free grace, are naturally exposed to this danger, can it be pretended that not *one* of them is so? that a single instance cannot be given, of a human creature so situated, as to be under a moral necessity of perishing? Whatever God does at all must undoubtedly be just, and not unfit for him to do. No metaphysical or abstract reasoning of ours can be an equal match for a tough and obstinate fact: and therefore God's having in fact done a thing in any one instance, ought always to be regarded by us as the clearest evidence that can be produced, that he may do it in thousands or millions of instances; because it is sufficient to dissipate at once all our glimmering apprehensions of the injustice of it, or the inconsistency thereof with his own perfections. Let us attend then to facts, and see, whether God, in his providential dispensations, has not actually put some at least of the human race in such circumstances as renders the shipwreck of their salvation (not indeed physically, but) morally necessary?

The present moral state of the world is so well known to be corrupt and depraved in a very extraordinary degree, that none of the suppositions I shall have occasion to make will be disputed, I think, as inconsistent with fact or experience. Suppose then one born even in a Christian country, but in one of the most degenerate

families of it, abandoned to the most scandalous profanity and licentiousness, where the first things that occur to his observation are, the indulgence of all our sensual appetites, rioting in the most expensive and stultified luxury, to the utter neglect of every thing that looks like piety or devotion, which he sees universally frowned upon, as a silly weakness, inconsistent with the knowledge of the world, and peculiar to a set of gloomy contemptible wretches. Suppose not only his parents, whom nature teaches us to have a regard for, but the licentious servants usually entertained about such a family, and the graceless company that may be supposed to haunt it, some of them perhaps eminent for their wit, and confessedly superior to poor young master in the endowments of the mind; suppose all of them, instead of ever dropping a hint in favour of religion, employing their wit, and reason too, in turning it into ridicule, vindicating, by the most specious arguments, irreligion and sensuality, and representing it as the most odious cruelty, for the great judge of the world to execute the threatenings he has denounced against it: suppose any books that fall in his way, or he finds time to look into, are either on the same side of irreligion, or stuffed with entertaining gallantry and corrupt amusement: suppose an utter neglect in such a family of all spiritual worship or devotion, either in public or private: at the same time, let us suppose the young gentleman himself endued with but a moderate measure of understanding, and by his constitution naturally libidinous, and of violent passions. Suppose him by such a train of circumstances (which I wish there was ground to say are chimerical or incredible) gradually led into habits of vice and wickedness, as well as the omission of duties incumbent upon a rational creature, and necessary to train up a soul for immortality; every omission and every commission adding to the strength of the habits, till they are grown into a sort of second nature: Let me ask now, whether a creature so unhappily situated, if left entirely to himself, without any assistance from the grace of God, is likely to conquer his vicious habits? or if there is not a moral necessity of his eternal ruin? Have not many of the children of men actually been in such a si-

tuation, and left in it too, without grace, to perish? Surely then it must be consistent with the perfections of God to place some of his creatures in such a situation, that there is a moral necessity of their perdition. Such a situation cannot be inconsistent with a state of trial. Are not infants in a more favourable situation? And if God can do the greater, why may he not do the less?

And yet it is plain, that the situation might have been supposed still more unfavourable. We supposed him in a Christian country, where the name of a Saviour at least, and some useful hints, could not fail to reach his ears. Suppose him living in such a city as Sodom, where we are informed, by incontestible authority, that there were not ten righteous persons, or in the old world, where the single family that believed God, and were preserved from the general destruction, were not all righteous: but amongst the one was a Lot, and amongst the other a Noah. And therefore let us suppose him among the most barbarous and degenerate of the Heathen nations, where there is not so much as a Socrates to give them a glimpse of natural religion itself, sunk into the profoundest ignorance and the grossest idolatry, where their very religion itself consists in practices that are highly detestable in the sight of God, of which we have many instances in the scripture.

Such a supposition, I once thought, would have been admitted by every Christian as an instance of being quite out of the ordinary way of salvation, and of the most imminent danger of perdition, without some extraordinary interposition of divine grace. In this, however, I find I am disappointed; and it is not thought sufficient to allow the salvation of some eminent persons in the Heathen world, such as Socrates, whom God may have been pleased to distinguish by extraordinary grace, and to preserve from the impurities that others were involved in, as exceptions from a general rule, unless it be likewise yielded in the general, contrary to our Confession of Faith, that "men not professing the Christian religion may be saved in any other way whatsoever, even when their lives are framed agreeable to the law of that religion they do profess;" and that, however shamefully they may be corrupted, however grossly

idolatrous, however scandalously ignorant, the Hottentots themselves, it seems, not excepted, or if there be any other people where the very light of nature itself is yet more entirely extinguished.

This, I confess, is but a necessary consequence of the doctrine, that moral necessity is inconsistent with imputation; which is sufficient to convert the grossest wickedness, idolatry, superstition, and profanity, into the most perfect innocence. According to this doctrine, if they *cannot* do good that are accustomed to do evil *, God cannot *therefore* scatter them as stubble before the wind for the *greatness* of their iniquity †. And is there really no end of contradicting the threatenings of God, and inculcating the first and grand temptation of the old serpent, Ye shall not surely die ‡? Did not God exterminate the whole seven nations of Canaan, when their iniquity was full ||, i. e. after their idolatrous corruptions had been transmitted from father to son through several generations, on purpose to convince the world, that the universality of sin is no sufficient excuse for it in his sight? lest there should be among you, says God himself, man or woman whose heart turneth away from the Lord our God, to go and serve the gods of these nations; and it cometh to pass when he heareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart **. One would think that such a tremendous execution of divine justice, as the raining down fire and brimstone from heaven upon the whole cities and countries of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboam, nay, the destruction of the whole world by the flood, one family excepted, might have had more influence in beating out of our heads such a fond and partial imagination, than all the uncertain metaphysical arguments of conceited sinners in confirming it. Shall we venture to pronounce that to be injustice or cruelty which it is certain in fact God actually has done? and that with a kind intention to disabuse his creatures of so dangerous an error?

* Jer. xiii. 13.

† Jer. xxiv. 12.

‡ Gen. iii. 4.

|| Gen. xv. 16.

** Deut. xxix. 18. 19.

The chief ground that is pretended for this error out of the scripture is enough of itself to overthrow it, were the words but duly attended to. The Apostle Paul tells us indeed, That it is only they that have sinned in the law that shall be judged by the law. As for them that have sinned without law, what says he of them? That they shall be *saved* without law? Or does he barely say of them, as he does of the others, That they shall be judged without law? No: but that they shall perish without law *; intimating, that as nothing but eternal destruction can be expected to be the portion of those who are without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world †; so the great judge of the world will have sufficient ground to condemn them for breaches of the law of nature, which if they did not know they might know: for the work of the law is written in their hearts; their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing, or else excusing one another ‡. And, as he elsewhere reasons in that same epistle, The invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that, says the apostle, they are without excuse ||. In the apostle's apprehension, the tradition of false notions of God, and an idolatrous worship, from one generation to another, is an excuse that will by no means be admitted.

The truth is, as the apostle there informs us, the gross ignorance that overspread the Pagan world was a punishment inflicted upon them by God for their negligence in improving the light of nature, and the traditionary revelation which the whole world had from Noah: Because that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools: and changed the glory of the uncorrup-

* Rom. ii. 12.

† Eph. ii. 12.

‡ Rom. ii. 14.

|| Rom. i. 20.

tible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four footed beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, &c. Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections, &c. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, &c. * When men receive not the love of the truth, that they may be saved; for this cause, the apostle tells us, God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned, who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness †. The world, not long after the flood, became so corrupt and so ignorant of the true God, that he was thereby provoked to abandon them; and having chosen one people, not for any thing recommendable in them, but out of his free grace, among whom the true worship of God might be kept up, he in a manner entirely deserted the rest of the world, and gave them up, in a just resentment of their own negligence and sensuality, to a judicial blindness and hardness of heart. None of the fallen race of mankind can lay any claim to salvation, but through the promise of God and the covenant of grace. Now to the Israelites pertained the adoption and the covenants, and the service of God and the promises ‡. The rest of the world were strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world ||. To the Jews have succeeded the Christian church, as the only heirs of the same promises, which the apostle insists upon in the 4th chapter of the Romans, and the 3d chapter of the Galatians. This being the scripture-account of the matter, is it to be imagined that ever God will accept of that worship, or save men in that way, which is represented not only as so detestable to him, but as the effect of a judicial blindness, in consequence of his having deserted and abandoned them to perdition?

* Rom. i. 21. — 28.

† Rom. ix. 4.

‡ 2 Thess. ii. 10. 11. 12.

|| Eph. ii. 12.

Accordingly, when the Gentiles were converted to Christianity, and incorporated in the church of God, it is said, that salvation was brought to them; implying, that they had not, ordinarily at least, access to it before. I say then, says the apostle, Have they [the Jews] stumbled, that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles *. And, by the by, let any body but read the 9th, 10th, and 11th chapters of the epistle to the Romans, where the apostle is discoursing of the rejection of the Jews, and the calling of the Gentiles, and see whether he can possibly reconcile therewith this conceit of the Heathen way of religion being an ordinary way of salvation, so inconsistent with the whole strain of that discourse. I have often had occasion to reflect, how little the Arminians gain, by an observation which they lay so much stress upon, viz. that the apostle is not there speaking of the election of persons to salvation, but of the election of nations to the means of it. Be it so: but then it is plain he all along supposes that the one includes the other. Nothing can be more obvious, than that he takes it for granted, that an exclusion from the means of salvation implies an exclusion from eternal salvation itself. What if God, says he, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction; and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had before prepared unto glory? Who are they that are vessels of mercy prepared unto glory? Even us whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles. As he saith also in Osee, I will call them my people, which *were not my people*; and her beloved, which *was not beloved* †. It would be transcribing most part of these three chapters to take notice of every thing in them that confirms this, where the conversion of the Gentiles to true religion is so often called, their being saved, obtaining mercy, the reconciling of the world, their being cut out of a wild tree, and grafted, contrary

* Rom. xi. 11.

† Rom. ix. 25. — 25.

to nature, into a good olive tree, and thereby partaking of the fatness thereof *, &c.

But to return : Salvation is, in the scripture, usually reckoned among the privileges of the visible church. Our Saviour told the Samaritan woman, Ye worship ye know not what : we know what we worship : for *salvation* is of the Jews †. And when the gospel was published, it is always spoken of as the ordinary mean of salvation. I am not ashamed, says the apostle, of the gospel of Christ ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek ‡. And again : For after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to *save* them that believe §. For this reason, it is called the word of salvation **, and the way of salvation ††. And hence the Apostle Paul says, Be it known unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it ††. Alas ! how few are there even among them who are called by it, that are effectually called ? If the gospel itself proves to many of its hearers but like the seed cast on the highway, to many as the seed among thorns, and to many as the seed on stony ground, can any thing be thought an ordinary mean of salvation that is of so much less efficacy at least, not to say of a contrary operation ?

As Christ is the way, the truth, and the life, and there is no other name whereby we can be saved ; so it is certain, that the knowledge of him, and faith in him, is the ordinary mean of salvation. This, says our Saviour himself, is life eternal, to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent ||. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ +. This is the reason which the apostle gives to prove, that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation ; for therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith : as it is written, The just shall live by faith ++. And therefore the condition

* See Rom. x. 9. and xi. 7.

|| 1 Cor. i. 21

†† Acts, xxviii. 28.

+ 1 Cor. iii. 11.

† John, iv. 22.

** Acts, xiii. 26.

|| John, xvii. 3.

++ Rom. i. 17.

‡ Rom. i. 16.

†† Acts, xvi. 17.

of salvation is laid down in these terms : If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart, that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed *. To the same purpose are all those passages of scripture where faith in Christ is declared to be the condition of our salvation ; which are so numerous, that I shall not pretend to quote any of them ; especially as this is so notour and essential a doctrine of Christianity. But, as the apostle himself reasons in the above passage, How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard ? and how shall they hear without a preacher † ?

Nay, the knowledge of the true God, and the right worship of him, are expressly established in scripture as the necessary means of salvation. We must know the true God, as well as Jesus Christ, in order to eternal life ‡. And when Christ comes in flaming fire, he will take vengeance on them that know not God, as well as on them that obey not the gospel, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction §. Without faith it is impossible to please him : for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. In a word, the knowledge and belief of the truth is the ordinary mean of accomplishing mens salvation, which is expressly asserted in a great many passages of the scripture **. But the Heathen nations are always represented in scripture as ignorant of the true God, and incapable of worshipping him. The apostle gives this character of them that shall be saved, that they are worshippers of the true God : For whosoever, says he, shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. But then he immediately adds, How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed †† ? It is the character of the Gentiles, that they know not God : Even as the Gentiles, says the a-

* Rom. x. 9. 10. 11.

† Rom. x. 14.

‡ John, xvii. 3.

§ 2 Thess. i. 8. 9.

** John, viii. 32. ; xvii. 17. ; Acts, xv. 9. ; and xxvi. 18. ; 2 Thess. ii. 13. &c.

†† Rom. x. 13. 14.

people which know not God *. And again, Howbeit, then when ye knew not God, ye did service to them which by nature are no gods †. Their ignorance is represented as very gross: Walk not, says the apostle, as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart ‡. Accordingly they are described as no worshippers of the true God: Pour out thy wrath, says the Psalmist, upon the Heathen that have not known thee, and upon the kingdoms that have not called upon thy name §. And their conversion is thus foretold: I am sought of them that asked not for me: I am found of them that sought me not: I said, Behold me, behold me, to a nation that was not called by my name **. Nay, they not only do not worship the true God, but their religion itself consists in the grossest and most abominable idolatry: Ye know, says the apostle, that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led ††.

And indeed the wrath of God has been so often revealed, and in such high terms, against idolatry and false worship, that it is strange how any man who believes God to be in earnest in his threatenings, and to have just ground for them, can at the same time imagining the profession and practice of the most idolatrous and corrupt religion to be consistent with salvation. Does not the Apostle Paul assure us oftener than once, that idolaters shall not inherit the kingdom of God ‡‡? that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God, and therein have fellowship with devils §§? And, as he elsewhere reasons, What concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? and what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you +. Is it not a sin which God always expresses

* 1 Thess. iv. 5.

† Gal. iv. 8.

‡ Eph. iv. 17. 18.

§ Ps. lxxix. 6.

** Is. lxxv. 1.

†† 1 Cor. xii. 2.

‡‡ 1 Cor. vi. 9.; Gal. v. 20.; Rev. xxii. 15.

§§ 1 Cor. x. 20.

+ 2 Cor. vi. 15. 16. 17.

the highest jealousy against, and which he threatens, in the second command, to visit upon the posterity of those who are guilty of it, as being most commonly ready to imitate it? Did not God appoint the most exemplary vengeance to be inflicted upon the Canaanites for this very reason? and prohibit his people, in the strictest terms, to have any alliance or communication with them, upon the same account*? Did he not teach them to pronounce a solemn curse upon all who indulged themselves in such practices†? And, in a word, (not to insist upon many passages of the scripture that might be quoted to this purpose, particularly in the 44th, 45th, 46th, and 47th chapters of Isaiah), are not the ruins of Babylon to this day a standing monument of the fierceness of God's anger against Heathen idolatry? For it is the land of graven images, and they are mad upon their idols. Therefore the wild beasts of the desert, with the wild beasts of the islands, shall dwell there, and the owls shall dwell therein; and it shall be no more inhabited for ever; neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation. As God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and the neighbour cities thereof, saith the Lord; so shall no man abide there, neither shall any son of man dwell therein‡.

It is true, what the Apostle Peter observes, that in every nation, he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him||; but then it is as true, that in every idolatrous nation, he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, forsakes the idolatrous practices of his countrymen, obtains some right knowledge, and becomes a worshipper of the true God. The question is not concerning them that fear God, and work righteousness, in any nation. Where-ever there are any such, as it can only be an effect of the sovereign, free, and rich grace of God, so there is no doubt that he will, by some means or other, as he did to Cornelius, communicate to them such a measure of the knowledge of religion as he knows to be necessary, if not in ordinary, at least in extraordinary cases; and where-ever the subjects of his

* Deut. vii. 2.; and viii. 19 20.

† Jer. l. 38. 39. 40.

‡ Deut. xxvii. 15.

|| Acts, x. 35.

grace are numerous, his providence can never be at a loss to furnish them with the ordinary means. We find he opened an effectual door to Paul at Corinth: Because, as he himself expresses it, I have much people in this city *; not already converted, but intended to be so. The only question at present is concerning those who remain sunk in the depth of Pagan ignorance, superstition, and idolatry, even the Hottentots themselves, or if there be any thing more degenerated in the human nature, Whether "they can be saved when their " lives are framed according to the law of that religion " they do profess?" This is what was maintained, and in this only the present argument is concerned.

I have insisted the longer upon this point, because I own I could not help being somewhat shocked at the assertion. I do think the church of Scotland has good reason for saying, as in the above paragraph of the Confession of Faith, that "to assert and maintain that they may, is very pernicious, and to be detested." It is accusing God of injustice and cruelty, should he do what he has expressly threatened to do. It seems to imply (as indeed most errors do) a very slight sense of the evil of sin, as if the grossest Heathen idolatres, who have not the knowledge, and are not worshippers, of the true God, were sufficiently qualified for admittance into his presence, and the eternal enjoyment of him in heaven; and it is founded upon the admission of an excuse for sin, which, if it were to be admitted, would bring off in triumph, not only all who have an inveterate custom and habit of sin, even the most notoriously wicked and abandoned, but the very devils themselves; and, in one word, would absolutely annihilate moral evil, and moral good too, and leave neither virtue nor vice in the world.

Now, in hopes that this opinion, when it is well considered, and compared with the scripture, will be given up, let me observe, that the fact upon which it is founded is indeed a certain truth, how unjust soever the inference that is drawn from it. The fact which I admit, and which appears to be admitted by those who found

* Acts, xviii. 10.

upon it the false conclusion which has been considered, is, that there are many of Adam's posterity situated in the midst of so much darkness, and surrounded with such violent temptations, that it is morally impossible for them, in the maturest state of their natural powers, to wrestle through such difficulties, and to attain the knowledge of the true God, and the right worship of him, and to reform their idolatry and superstition, without the assistance of that grace which God, for wise reasons, that are best known to himself, does not see fit to bestow upon them. The fact being admitted on all hands, there are two very different inferences drawn from it. The first is, that a continuance in that gross ignorance, corruption, and idolatry, which, in certain circumstances, become morally necessary, is not at all displeasing to God, but perfectly innocent, and can have no effect in excluding any from the future happiness of heaven. This consequence being rejected, as it certainly is in the scripture, another, and a very different one, must needs follow, viz. that a moral impotence is not inconsistent with the imputation of guilt. This is a conclusion which may with the more safety and certainty be depended upon, because a moral impotence (i. e. an impotence which is not the necessary effect of any other cause different from ourselves, consisting entirely in an act of our own wills, but which none, without exception, ever does in fact overcome) affects every class of sinners, as well as that which has been mentioned. If this defence were to be sustained, the sins of infirmity, which no good man is free from in this life, would be no sins; the disobedience of unregenerated sinners, especially of the very worst of them, where the habits of vice are most deeply rooted, and long confirmed, nay, the malice and envy of the devil himself, would have nothing at all of moral evil in them.

But if this is no sufficient exculpation from any other sin, why should it be sustained in the case of original sin only? and why should it be thought a harder measure to condemn infants for what they were under a moral impotence of avoiding, than it is to condemn the adult, who are under the same sort of necessity? The

truth is, if God be obliged in justice to confer eternal happiness upon all that die in their infancy, he must likewise be obliged in justice to give grace to all the adult; and then it would not be free; nor would it be grace, but a debt that is due from the great Creator to the workmanship of his own hands. If this be an evident absurdity, and the freedom of grace perpetually asserted in the scripture, let us suppose God at liberty to give or withhold his grace as he pleases, and see how the matter would stand. Suppose a child new born; I ask, is it consistent with the justice of God to remove this child by death into the state of retribution, and to inflict upon him that small degree of punishment which is adequate to the present degree of his moral corruption? No, it is replied; it would be cruel and unjust to punish him in any degree for what he could not avoid. Unless he is to be made eternally happy in the other world, justice requires a trial of his rational powers in a more mature and adult state. Well then, let this seemingly merciful proposal take place, and let us see how far, upon the concession demanded, there would really, in most instances, be any goodness or mercy in it. The child's temporal life, then, is spared for a while; but as God is not obliged to afford him either the external means, or the inward assistance of divine grace, he may be supposed to pass some years among the most stupid and sottish kraal or tribe of the Hottentots, and after he has drunk in their corrupt sentiments, and been long inured to their epidemical vices and idolatry, he must pay the debt of nature at last, when he is obnoxious to a punishment a hundred fold greater in degree than at the first. This is all the effect of the favour or justice that was demanded for him. This is known to be in fact the case with multitudes of the human species. If there be no cruelty or injustice in such dispensations of Providence, (and who can be so presumptuous as to say there is?), shall we call by these names a treatment which saves one perhaps ninety-nine degrees of a hundred in their future punishment?

I shall add no more upon this subject, when I have observed, that as the doctrine of original sin is expressly taught in the scripture; so it seems to me to be a very

essential part of the Christian religion, and the denial of it to be an error of very great importance, as it stands in direct opposition to the great end and design of the gospel-revelation. The whole strain and tenor of the gospel is evidently calculated for humbling the pride of men, and laying their honour in the dust, for stopping every mouth, and bringing in all the world as guilty before God, as well as for exalting the freedom and riches of that grace to which we owe a salvation which was in no respect due to us in justice. The temper of mind required on our part, in order to our partaking of that redemption purchased by Christ, is a deep abasement and self-condemnation. Nothing can be more opposite to, or inconsistent with, the disposition that is a necessary condition of our salvation, than any thing like standing to our own defence, or insisting in any degree upon our own vindication. The corruption of our whole nature, if it be our own fault, and chargeable to our own account, is of all others the most humbling and self-abasing consideration; if it be not our fault, it is doubtless the most unanswerable defence of all our enormities, and must, if it take possession of our imagination, effectually prevent that contrition of spirit which is a sacrifice that God has declared he will not despise. Good men, in imitation of the Psalmist, do usually, in their penitent confessions, humble themselves before God upon the account of their original sin; and indeed without confession there is no forgiveness: but how can there be any self-condemnation for a thing that is not thought our fault, but our undeserved misfortune? How can we confess that which is not? I say, that which is not; for original weakness there may be, or call it by whatever other name we will, but original *sin* there surely can be none, if there be no moral evil in it. Where is that gratitude, which is all the return we can make for a salvation that is owing to the most astonishing and incomprehensible grace, if we insist upon it, as, in any instance, or in any respect, what was due to us in justice, and which God could not refuse, without the most barbarous cruelty? If a moral inability cannot, in the nature of the thing, be universal, but necessarily infers exceptions, where can be the ne-

cessity of the death of a Saviour for all men? And if it be a sufficient excuse for sin, how unreasonable must be the fierceness of that wrath which is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men? and how little ground for that costly and expensive expiation of the guilt of sin which the gospel has acquainted us with? In short, the admission of such principles would entirely change the spirit of, and new-model the whole gospel, as indeed, in fact, it usually does. And I have no scruple in appealing to experience and observation, which of the two sets of principles do commonly produce the most serious and conscientious Christians?

ESSAY II.

On Miracles.*

THE miracles wrought in confirmation of the Christian religion (supposing the truth and certainty of the facts) may be considered in three different lights; and in each of these they will appear, if attentively considered, to be sufficient proofs of the Christian religion: First, They may be considered merely as so many instances of works that are above the abilities of any mere man; 2dly, As so many instances of God's express approbation of those who were his instruments in performing them; and, 3dly, They may be considered as so many samples of the doctrines taught by them.

First, let us consider them as so many instances only of works that are above the abilities of any mere man. Now, regarding them in this view, in order to understand the nature of the proof arising from thence for the truth of the Christian religion, let us consider how miracles came first to be applied to this purpose. And of this we have a very natural account, *Exod. iv.* at the beginning. There we find, that after God had charged Moses with a commission to the children of Israel, Moses makes an objection that would be very ready to rise in any man's mind upon such an occasion: *vers. 1.* And Moses answered and said, But behold they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice: for they will say, The Lord hath not appeared unto thee. The message indeed itself was such as could not but be very acceptable to them; but at the same time, if they had nothing but his bare word for it, it was natural enough for them to ask, What evidence can you produce to convince us that you are really employed by God in this affair? how

* Vide *Prideaux Letter to the Deists*, p. 228.

shall we know whether God has commissioned you or no? Now, to obviate this objection, God himself puts him upon a method which was abundantly sufficient to satisfy them upon this head; and which accordingly we find was successful. He ordered him to work three miracles before them, or, in other words, to shew them three things done in their sight which evidently exceeded the abilities of any mere man, and consequently which he could never be supposed capable to do without the concurrence or co-operation (if I may speak so) of some superior being, far exceeding man in power and ability. Now, as it was exceedingly improbable, either that Moses would have hazarded his credit by such pretensions, without some assurance of having them made good from one who was able to do so, or that God would concur and co-operate with him in such circumstances, and upon such an occasion, so as really to make good these extraordinary pretensions, without a plain design of giving him credit with these to whom he delivered his commission; so this was a very natural, as well as successful, way of satisfying their scruples, and convincing them that he was indeed sent by God.

The first of these miracles we have an account of in the 2d, 3d, and 4th verses of the chapter: And the Lord said unto him, What is that in thine hand? And he said, A rod. And he said, Cast it on the ground; and he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent: and Moses fled from before it. And the Lord said, Put out thine hand, and take it by the tail. And he put forth his hand, and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand. That they may know that the Lord God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, hath appeared unto thee. The turning a dead stick into a living serpent, only by casting it on the ground, and the returning of that serpent into a stick, by taking it into his hand again, was a thing so far beyond the power of any man to perform, that it would very naturally lead the spectators to conclude, that there was a superior power co-operating with him; and having been done in attestation of that commission which he pretended to have from God, it was natural for them to believe, upon the sight of these instances that he gave

of almighty power co-operating with him, that his pretensions were not groundless, but that God had really appeared to him, and that he did indeed come from God. Here was a very plain and sensible difference between him and other pretenders. It is an easy thing indeed for any man that takes it in his head to pretend that God sent him to say so and so; but it is not so easy for every man to give such evidences of the interposition of Heaven in support of his authority.

Another instance will help to illustrate this matter a little farther, and I shall chuse that of the miraculous destruction of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. Notwithstanding the authority wherewith God had so signally invested Moses and Aaron, these men not only refused to submit to them, but raised a considerable rebellion against them. Now, what method is fallen upon in this case, for convincing the people that these men were in the wrong, and for the farther confirmation of the authority of Moses and Aaron? We will find it Numb. xvi. 28. 29. 30.: And Moses said, Hereby ye shall know that the Lord hath sent me to do all these works: for I have not done them of mine own mind. If these men die the common death of all men, or if they be visited after the visitation of all men; then the Lord hath not sent me. But if the Lord make a new thing, and the earth open her mouth, and swallow them up, with all that appertain unto them, and they go down quick into the pit; then ye shall understand that these men have provoked the Lord. Here is a fair appeal made to God himself for the decision of the cause. Moses consents to lose all his credit amongst them, if God did not shew a very extraordinary and unusual act of his power against the rebels, in the sight of all the congregation: an act which was as little in the power of Moses as creation itself, and which it was impossible he could foresee by any other means but that of divine revelation. Well, what was the event? We have it in the following verses: And it came to pass, as he had made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground clave asunder that was under them: and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their

goods. They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them : and they perished from among the congregation. And there came out a fire from the Lord, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense. Now I would only beg leave to ask at any man who admits the truth of the history, (which you know in the present argument is taken for granted), I would ask him, If you yourself had been present upon the spot, and an eye-witness of the whole matter; if you had heard Moses make so fair an appeal, where he had so prodigious an odds against him, and had actually seen what followed immediately after, what would you have thought of Moses's pretensions then ? If you had been an Israelite, how would you have behaved ? Would you have followed the example of these unhappy wretches whom you saw but just now perish in so dismal and extraordinary a manner ? or would you have submitted to the authority of Moses, and owned his divine commission ? *Zacharias, Luke, i. 18. Vid. 2 Kings, xx. 9.*

From this account of the matter, it appears, that miracles are a very proper evidence of the divine mission of the person at whose word they are performed, and very fit for giving him credit with those to whom he is sent. No body pretends, as far as I know, that there is any natural and immediate connection between a miracle and the truth of this or that particular doctrine, abstracting from the authority of the person who delivers it : For example, between the transmutation of Moses's rod and the coming of a Messiah. But I hope every man who believes the being of God will allow, that there is an evident connection between truth and the word of God, and as evident a connection between the word of God and the word of one to whom God has, in an extraordinary and immediate manner, revealed his mind ; and as evident a connection between God's having revealed his mind to Moses, for example, in an extraordinary and immediate manner, and Moses's telling others a thing that it was impossible for him to know any other way : As for instance, that the earth should open and swallow up Korah, &c.; and that his rod

should be turned into a serpent, with all other events of the like nature.

If it be objected, that God's revealing his mind to him in one instance is no evidence that he has revealed it to him in another, I answer, That either God must have revealed his mind to him in all the particular instances with respect to which he pretends so, or else he must be an impostor. And it is not to be imagined, that so holy a being as God is would have such an immediate and peculiar intercourse and correspondence with a person of so base and so profligate a character, or that he would chuse to give so much credit to one who he knew would abuse it to so vile a purpose.

Besides, there is nothing more ordinary in the world, than for one who pretends to be commissioned by another, to attest his commission, by producing something which it was not in his own power to obtain the possession of, without the allowance and permission at least of him from whom he pretends to have received his commission: For example, if a person should come to a company of rebels, pretending to be sent by the King, and to be authorised by him to make such or such proposals to them, it would be very natural for them, in the first place, to demand what evidence he can produce to convince them, that he is indeed sent by the King, or that he has his allowance to make such proposals to them. If he had no other way to satisfy them but his own affirmation only, it is scarcely to be expected that this would acquire him sufficient credit for the negotiating of any important affair. But if, in answer to their question, he should produce a commission from the King, with the King's own seal annexed to it, this would be looked upon as a sufficient confirmation of his authority; and that for this reason only, because he could never have procured that seal to be affixed to his commission but by the King himself, or his ministers deputed for that purpose.

The case is precisely parallel to the use that Moses and Christ made of miracles. Their affirmation of their own authority contains the tenor of their commission. But as, in the other case, every man may write, or cause to be written, a commission to himself, and it is the seal

only that proves it to have come from the King; so the miracles wrought by them stand instead of the seal, and are proofs at least equally good that they were commissioned by God. There is as little relation between a certain impression upon wax and the proposals made by a King to his rebellious subjects, as there is between the doctrines of Christianity and the wonderful works that were done by the persons who revealed them: but in both cases the miracles and the seal may be supposed to have been equally beyond the reach of those who produce them without the allowance of the persons whose commission they pretend to carry; and consequently it is at least as ridiculous a question to ask what connection there is between a miracle and a doctrine, as to ask what connection there is between a seal and any of the particulars contained in the paper to which it is affixed.

When Pharaoh gave his ring to Joseph, and Ahasuerus gave his to Haman, was not this investing them with a general power, a giving them an unlimited commission, and an authorising all the subjects to receive whatever orders should happen to be issued out by these prime ministers as the will and pleasure of their Prince himself?

Instances of this kind are not only to be met with among great men who use seals, other people have methods of their own for attesting of commissions; which, however, do all of them agree in this, that the proof consists in producing something which the man who pretends to have the commission could not well be supposed to procure without the allowance and permission at least of him whose commission he pretends to carry. What, for instance, is more ordinary amongst country-people, than to use their knife, perhaps, or some such trinket, which they happen to have about them, for the procuring of credit to a messenger? A ploughman, who seldom fails to have a knife in his pocket, is at some distance from home, and wants something of that value that he knows his wife will not be willing to trust it with every messenger, unless she has some evidence that he was really sent by her husband. In this case he gives the messenger his knife, or some such thing, which his wife will easily know to be his, for a token, as they use

to term it, the same thing with *σημειον*, the word whereby miracles are commonly expressed in the New Testament. And this seldom fails to give the messenger as much credit with the mistress of the house, or with whomsoever he is sent to, as his business requires. There is no manner of relation, perhaps, between the knife and the commission wherewith the messenger is intrusted; but at the same time the knife is known to be a thing which the messenger would not readily have, if it had not been given him by the person who commissioned him. And this is the very thing that procures him the credit he wants.

There is another very common method used in cases of this nature for attesting of commissions, or procuring credit to a messenger, namely, to tell something which the person to whom the message is sent must be sensible the messenger could not know unless he had been informed by the person who sent him: For example, A and B are playing at bowls together; and having occasion to cast pieces, A gives in a new halfpenny, and B an old one; a matter of so little consequence, that it is not probable the news would spread far. The next day A sends D, a third person, who is unknown to B, to ask a sight of a book from B. Upon this B demurs a little, uncertain whether to trust the book with a person so little known to him as D. Sir, says D, in case you should have any suspicion of me, A bade me tell you, for a token, that you and he were at bowls together yesterday, and that when pieces were to be thrown, you gave an old halfpenny, and he a new one. Would he not be reckoned a very scrupulous person that would refuse after this to trust his book with one who gave so good an evidence that he was employed by his friend A?

Now this is precisely the case with respect to prophecies, (which may likewise be comprehended in the general notion of miracles, as that word is taken for every thing that men are incapable of doing without the immediate interposition, and extraordinary assistance or co-operation, of some being superior to man); for all these prophecies at least that are urged for the confirmation of revealed religion, contain an account of such

things as no man could know if he had not information from above.

By all the several instances that I have mentioned, it appears, that the only way of attesting commissions, and procuring credit to a messenger, is the empowering him to produce something which it is evident he could not have but from the person by whom he pretends to be employed. The story of the halfpence, the knife, the seal, the communication of some secret, and, I may add, the subscription of a name, which is used by way of proof or attestation, for no other reason but because the manner of writing is known to be peculiar to such a person, with every other method whereby a commission can be attested, do all of them, in the general, agree in the same thing with respect to the nature of the proof that arises from them. Whether any thing is said, or any thing is done, or any thing is shewn, to prove the truth of a commission, it must be such as it is evident the messenger himself could never have been capable, either to say, or do, or show, if he had not been enabled so to do by him whose commission he pretends to carry.

It must be owned, that all the several methods of attesting commissions that are mentioned above, and I believe I may add all others too as they are used amongst men, are liable to some inconveniencies, and consequently are proofs but of an imperfect kind. Particularly there are these three inconveniencies unavoidably attending them. First, It may happen that one man may intrust several of these things, such as his seal or his knife, with another, who shall be so void of honesty as to abuse them to a quite different purpose from what was intended by the owner. Secondly, They may be stolen, which is said to have been the case with respect to King Charles's seal affixed to the commission of the Irish rebels. And, thirdly, They may be counterfeited, which has been the case in many hundred instances. The first of these inconveniencies is most likely to happen with respect to things which are not appropriated to the business of attestation, such as a knife, or whatever else is commonly applied to different uses. And therefore the better sort of people especially have

generally fixed upon seals, and appropriated them to this particular purpose; which, for this reason, are more carefully kept than any thing else of the same intrinsic value out of the reach of such as may be ready to abuse them. But yet for all the care that men usually bestow in this matter, there is no doubt that seals themselves may sometimes fall into the hands of dishonest men, either by peoples confiding too much in the supposed honesty of knaves in disguise, or by their being stolen, or otherwise taken without the consent of the owners. And it is certain that both seals and subscriptions may be, and oft times have been, counterfeited. These are inconveniencies that unavoidably attend every human method of attesting a commission, and giving credit to a messenger, which will readily occur to any man who reflects upon this subject. For this reason none of these methods, as they are used among men, can be a proper foundation for an absolute and infallible certainty; and in so far as we discern the possibility or probability of any of these inconveniencies falling out in any particular instance, in so far must the suspicion detract from the credit we have to give in that case. But notwithstanding these manifest and unavoidable inconveniencies, it is certain in fact that all this does not hinder such methods from taking place universally in the world, neither doth it hinder men from giving credit to a messenger, when his commission appears to be attested in the manner above mentioned. And indeed who can pretend that all the business of the world should be at a stand, and that no man should give the least credit to another, till we can have as much certainty in every thing as in the mathematics?

But it is worth while to observe, that miracles, tho' proofs of the same kind with those above mentioned, are liable to none of these inconveniencies, and consequently are much more perfect than they: For, first, it is certain that God can never be deceived concerning the honesty of any person with whom he trusts the power of working miracles. As he is possessed of infinite and perfect knowledge, and sees through all the consequences of every thing, so he cannot but know what uses will be made of a miracle, and what purposes it will be

applied to; so that it is impossible for him to be overreached in this, or indeed in any other respect. Secondly, It is as impossible for any to steal the power of working miracles in one single instance, or to perform any one against the will, or even without the consent, of the supreme being. And, thirdly, There are some miracles at least (and such were most of those by which Moses and Christ attested their commissions) which it is equally impossible to counterfeit. Who can counterfeit a resurrection from the dead after one has been three, nay after one has been four days in the grave? Who can counterfeit the opening of the earth, and its swallowing up of those who deny the truth of his commission? In a word, as the nature of that kind of proof lies in the impossibility or improbability of one person's having such a thing to produce without the design or will of such another, so the nature of the inconveniency that attends it lies in the possibility or probability of one person's having such a thing to produce without the design or will of such another. Now, this possibility flows entirely from the weakness of men, and the imperfection of creatures, who are not capable in every instance to hinder other men either from imitating things which they keep most peculiarly in their own possession, and making things which shall exactly resemble them, or from taking the things themselves without their consent, or from using them otherwise than they expected. But as God alone is a being of infinite power, and of infinite knowledge, so there is no man who can do, or so much as imitate things that he can do, without having this power immediately communicated to him from God, or who can use such a power when it is communicated to him otherwise than God himself intended and expected.

Upon the whole, it appears that miracles, being works that no man can perform without the immediate interposition and peculiar concurrence of God for that effect, are in the nature of the thing very proper evidences to be produced in attestation of a message from God, and of the same kind with, though more perfect, and fitter for the purpose, than the proofs of commissions that necessarily and universally obtain among men all o-

ver the world : Hence it is no wonder to find that men have in all ages been accustomed to look upon them in this view. So that Nicodemus may be supposed to have spoken according to the common sense of mankind, when he said, John, iii. 2. " Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God : for no man can do these miracles that thou dost, except God be with him." We find the same opinion universally prevailing in every age, and among all sorts of people. Not to mention the influence that the miracles of Moses had upon the Israelites, upon Pharaoh himself, and the neighbouring nations, or those of Daniel upon Nebuchadnezzar ; when Elijah had restored to life the widow's son, we find she immediately concludes him a true prophet, 1 Kings, xvii. 24. " By this I know," says she, " that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth." In like manner, when our Saviour had raised the widow's son of Nain, Luke, vii. 16. " There came a fear on all ; and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us ; and, That God hath visited his people." And when he had turned water into wine, it is said, that " his disciples believed on him," John, ii. 11. and vers. 23. that " many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did." And even his enemies themselves seem to have acknowledged, that miracles were a sufficient proof of a divine mission, when he told them, John, vi. 29. " This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent. They said therefore unto him, vers. 30. What sign shewest thou, that we may see, and believe thee ? what dost thou work ?" And when he was hanging on the cross, they said, Matth. xxvii. 42. " Let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him."

I think it is of some importance in this affair to observe so general an agreement in the world upon this point, both because there is seldom any opinion that obtains the universal consent of mankind without some evident foundation for it, and because this afforded a proper occasion for the supreme being to fix upon miracles, which were in the nature of the thing very suitable to his purpose for attesting his messages to mankind,

and likewise for another reason, which I may have occasion to mention afterwards; and therefore I cannot but add here, that so universally does the world seem to have acquiesced in this point, till very lately at least, that our very best authors, in their writings against the Deists, never give themselves any trouble to prove it, but take it always for granted, or at best pass it over with some general observation, to remind their readers that God cannot be supposed to set his seal to a falsehood, and that the miracles wherewith a revelation is backed are God's seal set to it. Is it probable that such masters of reason as Dr Clark or Mr Dillon would have left out so necessary a link in the chain of their argument, if they had known that this matter was disputed? And if they knew no such thing, is it not a strong presumption that the agreement upon this point must have been pretty universal?

It is true there were several of the Jews in our Saviour's time, when the truth of his wonderful works was so evident, that they could not be denied, who yet by reason of the notions they had imbibed of a temporal deliverer, refused to give any credit to his pretensions; but then so far were they, even at this pinch, from taking it in their heads to deny the connection between miracles and a divine mission, upon the supposition of God's being the author of them, that in order to make their conduct look a little consistent, they were obliged to have recourse to the absurdity (as I hope I shall afterwards show it to be) of ascribing them to the power of the devil.

And as for the late author of the Grounds and Reasons, &c. himself, I do not remember that he has any one argument that can have the least tendency to invalidate this kind of proof. He tells us indeed, "That miracles can never make a doctrine to be true which is not true, can never make a prophecy to be fulfilled which is not fulfilled." But that this is no objection against the nature of the proof by miracles will appear, if we consider, that it may with equal reason be applied to other sorts of proof which are allowed by all the world to be good. For example, it may with equal reason be alledged, that the deposition of an hundred wit-

nesses can never make a man to be killed who is not killed, can never make a murder to be committed which is not committed; and yet the deposition of witnesses is every where taken for a very good sort of proof, upon which the most important affairs of this world are determined. If indeed the defendant could produce the man alive who was alledged to have been killed, this might well be made use of as a sufficient argument, that the crime whereof he was accused was incapable of being proven. In like manner, if any man can show that such a doctrine implies a contradiction, as has been an hundred times done in the case of transubstantiation, this is no doubt a sufficient argument that it is incapable of being proved either by miracles or by any other method whatsoever. But as it would be exceedingly ridiculous for an advocate in a court of justice, without pretending the absurdity of the accusation, to argue merely against the sufficiency of that sort of proof which has been already adduced on the other side, viz. the deposition of witnesses, by saying, that the deposition of witnesses can never make a thing to be true which is not true; so it is no less ridiculous for one who cannot pretend to show any contradiction in the doctrine of Jesus, to argue merely against the sufficiency of the proof by miracles, by saying, that miracles can never make a doctrine to be true which is not true. The truth is, the supposition that miracles may be wrought, and that witnesses may depose, on the side of the question that is not true, is, with respect to the first, absurd and impossible, and with respect to the second, rash and uncharitable, at least where there is not the clearest evidence to support it: and if any man will give me an instance of a doctrine which he can demonstrate to be false, confirmed by miracles in the manner that the Christian religion has been, I promise to give him an hundred where as many witnesses have deposed, that they all saw a man killed who is yet alive.

Before I proceed to apply what has been said to the miracles of Christ in particular, let me observe farther in the general, that the bare working of a miracle which is not accompanied with any pretensions to a divine mission, is no proof of any thing else but that there is an

immediate interposition of a power superior to that of man in the case; perhaps we know not why, though God does. As a piece of wax, with the impression of a seal upon it, which is not affixed to any paper, is a proof of nothing else but that a certain seal has been applied to this piece of wax, it must be the same paper that contains the commission, and has the seal affixed to it, in order to prove the commission contained in it to be genuine; and it must be the same person that pretends to a divine mission, and backs his pretensions with miracles, which he must actually appeal to for the truth of his commission, in order to prove the justness of his pretensions. God may perhaps think fit sometimes, in the course of his providence, to exert extraordinary acts of his power for awakening thoughtless men, and keeping up a sense of his being and attributes, or for other reasons which are a secret to us; but if any instruments are employed in this case, we have all the reason in the world to believe that they will be such as shall not abuse these wonderful events to other purposes than he intended: As a man will sometimes lend his knife to another for some particular occasion, though at the same time he will readily take care, that the other be not such as will take the opportunity of attesting thereby a commission which was never given him.

These things being premised in the general concerning the nature of this sort of proof, let us now consider a little more particularly the miracles that were wrought in confirmation of the Christian religion. And to pave the way for this, I shall, in the first place, lay down the facts themselves that we are to reason from upon the foregoing principles.

And, 1. It is certain that Jesus Christ pretended that he was sent by God to reveal to mankind the doctrines of religion, which they were to believe in order to salvation; the substance of which was, that he himself was the Son of God incarnate, who was both appointed by the Father, and had himself willingly and chearfully undertaken to suffer for the sins, and to give his own life a ransom for the lives of men, who are by nature in a state of sin and misery; and that as many as should accept of his mediation in the manner specified in the

scripture, should not perish, but have everlasting life. These, with other doctrines contained in the New Testament, which it would take too much time to give a detail of; he pretended to have received from God, and affirmed, that God had sent him to reveal these things to the world in his name. This we find him frequently affirming, particularly in the gospel of John. I shall mention but a few passages to this purpose amongst a great many others, John, viii. 42. says he, I proceeded forth, and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me. And John, vi. 38. I came down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him that sent me. And vers. 40. This is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life. Again, John, vii. 16. 17. My doctrine, says he, is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself. And John, xii. 44. Jesus cried and said, He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me. And, to add no more, says he, vers. 49. For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And with respect to the doctrine of the apostles, says he, John, xiv. 26. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. And John, xvi. 13. Howbeit, when he the Spirit of Truth is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.

2. It is certain, that Christ, by a word of his mouth, or a touch of his hand, healed all manner of the most inveterate diseases, restored sight to such as were born blind, gave hearing to the deaf, strength to the lame, and speech to the dumb, dispossessed demoniacs, turned water into wine, multiplied bread and fishes to a prodigious and astonishing quantity, turned the most boisterous storms into a calm with a word of command,

walked on the sea as if it had been a piece of pavement, raised men from the dead, told the secret thoughts of others, and foretold many things that were unlikely to come to pass, with innumerable other such wonderful works; and at last, after he himself was killed and buried, he did, on the third day, rise from the dead; and forty days after that he did, in the sight of his disciples, ascend into heaven in a glorious and triumphant manner, from whence, according to his promise, he sent the Spirit to his disciples on the day of Pentecost, whereby they were enabled to speak all manner of different languages, and to work divers other miracles, where-ever they came in the course of their travels, to instruct and reform the world. The truth of all these matters of fact is granted, which saves me the trouble of producing the proofs wherewith I have already confirmed it elsewhere.

3 It is certain, that Christ and his disciples made use of these wonderful and miraculous works for attesting the commission they pretended to have from God, and appealed to them for the truth of the doctrines which they taught, as you may see in these following passages. John, v. 36. But I have greater witness than that of John, says our Saviour; for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me. John, x. 24. 25. When the Jews came round about him, and said to him, How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly. Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. And vers. 37. & 38. If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know and believe that the Father is in me, and I in him. See also John, xv. 24. and xiv. 11. with many other places. And, to the same purpose, we have many instances of the apostles appealing to the miracles as an evidence that the doctrines of Christianity were from God: John, xx. 30. 31. Many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that believing

ye might have life through his name. Acts, ii. 22. Ye men of Israel, says Peter, hear these words : Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you, by miracles, wonders, and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as you yourselves also know. Mark, xvi. 20. And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Acts, xiv. 3. Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands. And, to add no more, Heb. ii. 4. God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will.

Nay, 4. Not only did he appeal to them after they were wrought, but he promised them beforehand, hazarded all his credit upon the event, and appealed to it for the justness of his pretensions. This was virtually done in every miracle where there was any visible attempt made towards it in the presence of the spectators prior to the falling out of the event. For example, when Christ came to Lazarus's grave, put up a solemn prayer to the Father after the stone was removed from the place where the dead was laid, and cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth ; was not this plainly a venturing all his credit upon the certainty of that unlikely event before ever there was any visible prospect of success ? But this was more explicitly done with respect to his own resurrection and ascension. Three times in the gospel according to Mark we find him telling his disciples of his death and resurrection, and that with very particular circumstances. Once before his transfiguration, Mark, viii. 31. And he began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. After his transfiguration he told them the same thing again before he went up from Galilee, Mark, ix. 31. For he taught his disciples, and said unto them, The Son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him, and after that he is killed, he shall rise the third day. Again, as they

were in the way going up to Jerusalem, Mark, x. 32. 33. 34. he tells them in a very solemn manner, and with very particular circumstances, what should happen to him there, and, among other things, that the third day he should rise again. Besides these instances of his telling it to his own disciples, we have an instance likewise of his giving this as a sign or proof of his divine mission to the scribes and Pharisees: Matth. xii. 38. 39. 40. Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee. But he answered and said to them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign, and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas. For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. Here is a fair appeal made to a future miraculous event, and the accomplishment of a very strange prediction, in so much as his credit would have been entirely lost, if he had lain any longer than three days in the earth. And then as to his ascension, not only did he tell his disciples oftener than once, in his last discourse to them immediately before his death, that he was to go to the Father, particularly John, xvi. 16. A little while, and ye shall not see me; and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father; but more particularly, he said to them expressly, John, vi. 62. What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?

These are the facts, from whence I cannot but think there is a very natural and easy inference to the truth of the Christian religion. Every body must needs allow, that the works done by Christ and his apostles were at least very extraordinary, and such as could not but make a sensible impression upon peoples minds, and set them a-thinking upon the subject; and, by the way, this is a circumstance that renders miracles very proper for attesting a revelation from God. Unusual and immediate instances of Almighty power is apt to awaken men to attention, who are not wont to give themselves the trouble of thinking seriously as long as things continue to go on in the common course.

The first inference that naturally arises from them, and which no man could pretend to refuse, is, that there must have been a cause sufficient to produce these effects, there must have been a power proportionable to the effecting of these extraordinary works exerted upon these occasions. And upon this it would be very natural to inquire farther, how these men could come by such a power? or, as we find the Jews themselves ruminating, Mark, vi. 2. From whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands?

And, in answer to this question, it is certain either that the power which effected these wonderful works must be the result of mere human abilities, or it must come from some other being superior to man.

That the miracles wrought by Christ and his apostles were quite out of the reach of all human abilities, will abundantly appear to any one who attentively considers either the works themselves, or the manner in which they were done; who considers how great they were, how many, how public, how evident. But not to consume any time upon so easy a question, let me only ask, if the resurrection of Lazarus, for example, from the dead, after he had lain four days in the grave, was a thing that was in the power of any mere man to accomplish, only by standing beside the sepulchre, and crying, Lazarus, come forth? or will any one pretend, that a mere man, after he is himself dead and buried, and has lain three days in the grave, is able, by his own power, to restore himself to life, and to rise out of his grave? Let any man who pretends that these things, with innumerable other instances of the like nature, are within the compass of human abilities; let him show us any such instances of extraordinary power, and then his pretensions shall be duly regarded, and we shall freely own he deserves to be attended to. But indeed these pretensions are so very wild and extravagant, that one may be ashamed even to be caught reasoning against them. The author of the Christian religion has not left us the trouble of distinguishing nicely between the operations of God and those of man: He has done such works as

all men, of whatever rank or degree, whether he is a peasant or a philosopher, must needs be sensible at first sight are infinitely beyond the power of man.

Here then is one thing certain, namely, that these works are not the result of mere human abilities, though never so greatly improved by art or application, and that these extraordinary effects could never have been produced without the immediate extraordinary interposition of some superior being, far exceeding man in power and capacity. But seeing the visible instruments at whose word, as often as the experiment was made, these extraordinary events never failed to come to pass, appeared only to be men, it is natural, in the next place, to inquire farther, whence then had they these surprising powers? and who was that superior being that interposed to give them such mighty countenance? And here one would be apt to look immediately to God, who is the fountain of all power, and to whom all things are possible; but because there are two sorts of beings, who may perhaps exceed man in many instances of power, and because I am willing to make all the suppositions that the case will bear, let us consider which of them it is fittest to ascribe these works unto.

It is certain, then, either that the miracles of Christ and his disciples must have been done by God himself, or at least some of those inferior, though good spirits, that are employed by him, and for that reason are called his angels; or else they must have been done by devils or wicked spirits. If the last of these suppositions be chosen, I have these three things to say against it.

First, We are perfectly and infallibly sure, that the divine omnipotence is abundantly able to perform all the wonderful works above mentioned, whereas it is impossible that we can be sure whether the power of any creature is sufficient for this purpose. I confess that it is impossible for us to know with any certainty how far the natural power of good or evil angels extends, or how far God restrains them from exercising their natural powers in producing such or such particular effects; and for this very reason, no man can pretend to say with any certainty, that such amazing works as are recorded in the history of the New Testament were really

the effects but of a created power. I shall only put the case, that one finds a heavy stone removed out of a place where it formerly lay. There are only two persons to whom this can be ascribed, the one a strong and healthy man, the other a weak and sickly one; the one is without all question abundantly able to do it, and it is at least exceedingly uncertain whether the other is so. Now, would it not be very unreasonable in this case for one obstinately to ascribe it to the last rather than to the first? Nay, there are some of the miracles of Christ which are so contrary to the known and settled laws of nature, and to the constant and uniform course thereof, that it is not reasonable to suppose that he who was the author of nature would leave them in the power of his grand enemy. No power less than God's could settle and establish the course of nature, and it is but reasonable to think, that no power less than his can unsettle it. And Dr Clark himself, who seems to make abundant allowances for the power of creatures, owns, concerning "some singular miracles, such as raising the dead, that there is all the reason in the world to believe they are absolutely beyond the power of evil spirits to effect; because," adds he, "we have the greatest reason to believe, that the souls of men are in the hand of God, and cannot be removed by the natural power of any inferior beings."

But, 2dly, whatever the natural power of evil spirits may be, we know that the exercise of it is always under the restraint of the supreme being; and we may be absolutely sure, as sure as we can be of any of the known attributes of God, that he will never suffer such miracles to be wrought by wicked spirits, in behalf of an impostor, as would necessarily and unavoidably lead men into error. If miracles are, as I have observed already, proper evidences of a divine mission, and if men have always looked upon them as such, then wherever miracles are wrought for the confirmation of a doctrine that has no inconsistency in it, or contradiction to any other known truth, men cannot possibly help giving their assent to it, there being no means left whereby they may be undeceived; and so the error, if it should be one, would be altogether invincible; and

that would in all respects be the very same thing as if God worked the miracles to deceive men himself: as a king could not justly blame any man for receiving a commissioner whom he willingly allowed to use a counterfeit seal, which it was impossible for any man to distinguish from the great seal of the kingdom.

3dly, As we may assuredly conclude, from the consideration of the nature and attributes of God, that he will never permit such things, so we may easily gather, from the nature of evil spirits, that though they could, yet they would not, have contributed any thing to the performance of Christ's miracles; and that because the whole design of them was destructive of their own power and kingdom. Who can imagine, that ever the devil would enter into a design for promoting holiness and goodness, love to God and one another, which were the great things that our Saviour endeavoured to promote? Would ever the devil do any thing for procuring credit to such a person? or, if he was drawn into it unadvisedly at the first, yet is it in the least imaginable, that he would persist in the same conduct after he saw the influence that Christ's miracles actually had upon men? Besides, most of the miracles of Christ were beneficial to mankind; so that there cannot be a more groundless calumny than to impute such works to the devil, who is known to be the great enemy of mankind. Who can imagine, that the devil would exert his power in feeding men that are hungry, in healing men that are diseased, and in delivering men from the most grievous afflictions and calamities? Nay, did not many of Christ's miracles consist in driving the devil out of those men whom he had taken possession of? which is extremely inconsistent with his being the author of them. This is the very argument which our Saviour himself made use of in answer to the objections of the Pharisees. And indeed it must be owned to be a most unanswerable one, Matth. xii. 25. 26. 28. And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself, is brought to desolation; and every house divided against itself, shall not stand. And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand? But if I cast

out devils by the spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you.

By the two first of these particulars it appears, that it was physically impossible, and by the last that it was morally impossible, for the devil, or any wicked being, to be author of Christ's miracles. He has not a natural power sufficient for some of them; and we cannot be sure that his natural powers are sufficient even for others of them: and whatever his natural powers are, we may be abundantly sure that God would never have given him permission to exercise them in such a manner, and in such circumstances; nay, though he should have had permission, his nature, and the principles upon which he acts, must have been changed before he would have done it.

Upon the whole, seeing the miracles wrought in confirmation of the Christian religion could not have been the effects of the natural powers either of men or of evil spirits, it remains that they must have been done by good spirits, who are vastly superior to us in power and capacity; that is, either by God himself immediately, as it is extremely probable at least with respect to some of them; or by his angels, as it is not improbable with respect to others of them. But it is the very same thing, and makes no alteration in the argument, whether God himself did them immediately, or employed any of his angels for that purpose, as a commission is just as valid to all intents and purposes, whether the seal was put to it by the King himself, or by some of his ministers deputed by him for that effect.

And indeed how do we know that there is a God but by his works? We see things that can be ascribed to no other cause but such a being as we conceive God to be; and from thence we certainly conclude, that there must be such a cause, or else there would not be such effects; and particularly this has been frequently and most justly concluded from the curious structure and admirable formation of a human body, together with the surprising union between it and the soul; and therefore, when we see a dead body restored to life, a body which was not only rendered so unfit for the operations of a soul, that a total separation had actually ensued,

and continued for several days, but a body which had already begun to corrupt, and moulder into dust, who can help saying upon such an occasion, This is indeed the finger of God ?

Let us now recollect what has been said, and see what it amounts to. On the one hand, it appears, that the only way that one person has to attest a commission from another person who is absent, and the way that universally obtains all over the world, is, to produce something which it is plain he could not have had but from the person from whom he pretends to have received his commission; to say, or do, or show, something which every body must needs be sensible he could never have been able, either to say, or do, or show, if he had not been enabled so to do by that other who he says commissioned him. And, on the other hand, it is either granted or proven, that Jesus Christ and his apostles affirmed, that the doctrines of religion which they taught were the word of God, which he had ordered or commissioned them to reveal to the rest of mankind. And for proving the truth of this their commission, they offered to do such works as no other men upon the face of the earth were able to do, such works as every body who reflects upon them must be sensible can be ascribed to nothing else but the extraordinary interposition of God. To these they appealed for that effect, and offered to renounce all their pretensions, if such things were not done. Accordingly, as often as they attempted such things, they never failed to succeed. What now can any man object against such a proof, a proof which they could justly defy all the rest of the world to produce ? If I cannot know him to be sent of God who sheweth me such a seal of omnipotency to his commission, as raising the dead, for example, I have no possibility of knowing who speaketh from God at all; for here is a proof at least as strong as the strongest proof of any commission that ever was produced in the world.

Upon the supposition that God Almighty was the author of these miracles, let me only ask, What other design could he possibly have in these extraordinary and unusual operations, but the giving credit to the Chri-

stian religion, and confirming the extraordinary pretences of those who revealed it? It is not enough to say, that these were things which you do not pretend, and which you are not concerned, to account for: for the instruments who were employed by God in these his unusual operations having declared that they have a commission from God to you, if you own yourself to be a subject of the supreme being, it concerns you at least to consider and examine whether it be really so or no. How do you think a sovereign Prince would resent it, if any of his subjects, when a person was sent to them with an important commission from him, and showed the King's seal annexed to it, should put him off only by saying, that what he showed them was somewhat strange indeed, but no demonstration that he was employed by the King; that he had indeed got a piece of wax affixed to his commission, which looked very like the impression of the King's seal, but that they were not in the least concerned to account for the causes of its being formed into such a shape, or the design which the King might have had in affixing it to such a piece of paper or parchment? Would such an answer, do you think, become loyal and dutiful subjects? or would any man presume to talk at this rate, or treat in this manner, one who had given out that he came from the sovereign, if he was really in a disposition to obey the laws of his Prince, to know his will, and conform himself to it? Now, miracles, as they are works of God, so they are such works as are very unusual and extraordinary. And as to the miracles of Christ in particular, no age since the beginning of the world to this present time ever saw any thing like them; for, according to the Jews themselves, the miracles of Moses amounted but to seventy-six, and those of all the prophets, for the space of some thousands of years, but to seventy-four; whereas those of Christ and his disciples were altogether innumerable. They cannot be supposed to have been done without any design at all. Being done by the hands, and at the word, of those who pretended to have received a new doctrine from God, the design of attesting this appears at first sight to be very likely at least, it being in all respects so very much the

same with the only way whereby any commission from one who does not think fit to appear himself can be attested at all. And if men can neither assign any other possible design of these works, nor bring any objection against this, and yet continue to reject it, is it any wonder if such a conduct should be called a sullen stiffness, as extraordinary and unusual in other affairs as the miracles themselves, and as unaccountable too as miracles are represented by such men to be?

But this is not all. Not only is it impossible to assign any other design of God's doing such miraculous or unusual works, either at all, or at the word of the first preachers of Christianity rather than of other men; but if we lay all the circumstances of this affair together, it will evidently appear, that the attesting of their commission was really the design which God had in his view. And in order to make out this, I desire only it may be granted me, that God is a being of infinite knowledge, and of infinite justice, goodness, and truth. Now, if God be possessed of infinite knowledge, then he knew perfectly well, that miracles, when they were performed by those who pretended to a divine mission, were universally taken amongst men for a divine attestation of it. He knew that this opinion was by no means a groundless one, being founded upon the universal practice of mankind, a practice that arises from a necessity which flows from the very nature of the thing. He not only knew perfectly beforehand, that the native consequence of these miracles would be the credit of the author, and the other first preachers of Christianity, of their doctrines, and of all their extraordinary pretences, but he saw likewise, after some of these miracles were performed, that this actually was the consequence of them. He saw the world flocking in multitudes to the new opinions, and all this upon the credit which the pretended revealers of them had acquired by the miracles which he all along had never failed to perform at their word, or upon any attempt which they made that way. He knew that these men gave it out to the world, that they had received from him the power of working miracles with this very view, that the world might believe their doctrine to be from God. He knew that

they appealed to them for the truth and justness of their pretensions; and particularly he knew that the author of the Christian religion had undertaken to rise from the dead after he had lain three days in the grave; that he had made a particular appeal to this for a proof of his divine authority, and had, some time before his death, given it as a sign to those who doubted of his commission from God. And now pray how did the supreme being, upon whom it entirely depended whether these things should happen or not, how did he behave in a conjuncture of such circumstances, and upon this view of the situation of affairs? Did he so much as leave the ordinary laws of nature to their constant and uniform course? or rather did he ever suffer their strange attempts to fail so much as once of success, tho' it cost him the dispensing with the most known and settled laws of his creation? Did he not, in a most remarkable manner, step out of his ordinary road, in favour of these extraordinary pretences? Did he not, every time that these men desired it, every time that they made any attempt towards it, change the usual and uniform method of his providence, on purpose to bring about such events as they wanted, before crowds of admiring spectators? And particularly, for as extraordinary and unusual a thing as it is, did he not, by his almighty power, raise up Jesus Christ again from the dead, with the very same circumstances, and in the very same manner, that Christ himself had formerly undertaken and foretold it should be done? If this be not a declaring his design in the loudest and most express manner, pray what is it that can be construed to be so?

I remember the late ingenious author of the Religion of Nature delineated, lays it down for the foundation of his scheme, that actions are declarative of truth and falsehood, as well as words; and that a proposition may be affirmed or denied the one way as well as the other; which he illustrates by several instances. And indeed this is so certain, that I doubt if there be any body who will pretend to deny it. But as words, which are only arbitrary signs of one's thoughts, come to have their meaning settled by a combination of circumstances, and

by an agreement among men; so actions likewise, tho' in some instances indeed they are natural signs of the thoughts, yet in others their signification depends upon agreement and a combination of circumstances likewise. If a certain person, A for example, should hold up either his right hand or his left hand, and there is no other circumstance to determine the signification of that action, no body in that case would be obliged to regard it. But let us suppose, that A is standing upon the top of a mountain, and there are two servants of his, B and D, upon the top of another mountain; let us suppose likewise, that B and D are disagreed which of them two shall go to their master when he makes a sign of calling one of them, that therefore they enter into an agreement, that when he holds up or makes the sign with his right hand B shall go, when he does it with his left D shall go; let us likewise suppose, that A is informed of this agreement, and, in a word, that the whole matter is known to all the three persons; if after this A should hold up or make a sign to them with his right hand, would not this be a sufficient signification of his will that B should come to him? and if it really was not his will that B should come, would not the holding up of his hand; in such circumstances, be every whit as much a lie, as if he had expressly pronounced these words with his mouth, It is my will that B should come here?

In order, therefore, to form a right judgement of the true meaning of all these extraordinary actions of God, the miracles that were done by the hands, or at the word, of the first preachers of Christianity, we must take in the consideration of all the circumstances that accompanied them. We do not pretend that any of the miracles of Christ, not even his raising the dead, nay nor his own resurrection from the dead itself, considered barely in themselves, and abstracted entirely from every other circumstance whatsoever, ought to be looked upon as a proof of any thing different from the events themselves. The Evangelist Matthew tells us, ch. xxvii. 52. that about the time of Christ's death and resurrection, there happened likewise a resurrection of several other departed saints. But see what an alteration will be

made by the circumstances of things ! The resurrection of these persons was never, as far as I know, taken for an evidence, or urged as a proof, that they had any commission from God ; whereas the resurrection of Christ is, and has been, regarded in this view by all the Christians that ever were in the world. Nay, I believe I may venture to defy all the world to produce so much as a single instance, at least before the present age, of any one person, even among the bitterest and most virulent enemies of Christianity, who ever took it in his head to deny that the truth of the Christian religion followed as a necessary and unavoidable consequence from the resurrection of Christ, supposing the truth of the fact.

It is well known, that orders are given aboard the fleet, and the will of the admiral, for example, signified to inferior officers at sea, by signs, as the firing of such a number of guns, and the hoisting of flags of such and such colours, at such and such parts of the ship, by the different combinations of which actions most of the necessary orders which there is any common occasion for may be given without any use of words. The hoisting of a flag is an action that is naturally significative of nothing, if it be not that he who does it has a mind to add some new ornament to the ship ; but if an admiral, in the midst of a large fleet under his command, should cause a flag of such a colour to be hoisted at such a part of the ship, or order any other action to be performed which he knows will be taken by the whole fleet for a command given them by him to crowd all the sail on, for example, that their ships will carry ; then it is plain, that if this be done through the whole fleet, whatever consequence should follow, there is none to blame but the admiral. If the crowding on their sail was not really his will, it is certain that he was really guilty of a notorious lie ; and if the whole fleet should happen to be lost by having so much sail upon it, there is no body to blame for it but himself.

There are some actions likewise, which, abstracted from any agreement, have a natural signification, that may be evidently perceived by every body. But even this natural signification may be much confirmed, and

have a higher degree of certainty stamped upon it, by the addition of several circumstances. For example, if a King should order a prisoner to be released as soon as he heard that he was thrown into prison by some of his inferior officers, the very natural signification of this action of the King would be construed by every body to be the King's approbation of the prisoner, and a justification of him from the supposed crime. But how strongly would this be confirmed, upon the supposition of the few following circumstances? namely, That the person released had pretended to carry the King's orders to some inferior magistrates: That, in support of this pretension, he had produced several things, which they might easily know he could have from no other man but the King; and things, too, which were always used to be produced upon such occasions, and which commonly gave satisfaction: That, upon their persisting still to despise him, and reject his pretended commission, as they were pleased to call it, he had delivered himself to them somewhat to this purpose: Gentlemen, I assure you the King will some time call you to a severe account for treating a commissioner from him in the manner you have done; and therefore I wish you would seriously consider the matter, and give but a due attention to the evidences that I have produced, and am still willing to produce, of my being really commissioned by him. I have already given you such evidences of this as might have satisfied any reasonable persons; but since you insist upon more, I make this fair proposal to you: Do ye put me in prison, as an usurper of an office I have no right to, and a forger of his Majesty's commission: let the King be fully informed of every thing I have taken upon me to deliver as his will and pleasure, and, in short, of every thing I have presumed either to say or do in consequence of the public character I claim; and, particularly, let him be informed exactly of this proposal I am now making to you; and if he do not immediately send three of his principal officers of state, with orders to break down the prison-walls in which you shall put me, and to lead me in triumph to his own palace, then you shall have my free leave to

look upon me as an impostor. Let us suppose now, that these obstinate men did really imprison him as an impostor, and insolently declared they would take their hazard of the King's displeasure; and that the King, upon his being fully informed of the whole matter, did send the very same number of officers precisely that is mentioned above, with a sufficient army, which did, by his orders, actually raze the prison-walls to the very foundation, led out the prisoner with all possible marks of honour, and, to complete the tragedy, did, some time afterward, put the disobedient magistrates to death, and demolished their city, as a farther mark of his displeasure for the treatment they had given to his commissioner: how do you think any man would judge of this conduct of the King, if after all this it could be made appear, that the pretended commissioner was really nothing else but a cheat and impostor?

How much the circumstances of Christ's miracles, and particularly of his resurrection, have a resemblance of the circumstances above mentioned, I may leave to any impartial person who knows any thing of the matter to declare. Did not Jesus pretend to carry a commission from heaven to earth? Did he not, in justification of this pretence, perform abundance of works which were absolutely beyond the power of men, without an extraordinary interposition from Heaven for that effect? Did not the Jewish government still persist to despise him, and reject his commission? Unsatisfied with what he had already done, did they not still call for a sign from heaven to convince them that he had a commission from thence? Did not he, in answer to this demand, appeal to a resurrection which he promised of himself after he should be put to death by them? Did he not specify the precise time when this strange event should happen? Was not this absolutely impossible without the interposition of more than human power? Did not they, after all, condemn him as an impostor, and actually murder him under that infamous character? Was not every circumstance of the whole affair perfectly well known to God? and yet did he not, according as he had said, rise again from the grave at the very time that

he had named, viz. on the third day after his death, and in a glorious manner visibly ascend? I may add likewise, did not God, a few years after this, destroy that city, and exterminate that nation, that had imprecated his blood upon their own heads, with such unusual circumstances, that Titus himself was sensible, and openly professed, that he was only the instrument of the divine vengeance? What stronger proof can possibly be demanded, or even imagined?

I shall only beg leave to put one other case, which I think somewhat parallel to the case in hand, and desire you to answer to yourself, how you would behave, if you had any concern in it? Let us suppose, that you are certainly informed, that two or three people, at some distance from this, have agreed to take a certain action of yours for a signal or evidence of some truth which you can inform them of: Let the thing they want to be informed of be your seeing, or not seeing, of something which they cannot discern in the place where they happen to be; but which, if it be at all, will be in your sight at such a part of the road where you are to pass: Let the signal of your seeing it be your stepping aside about fifty paces out of your road, or waving your hat over your head, or some such thing, which you are not wont to do. Now, let me ask you, whether, in case you did not see the thing, you would step aside fifty paces out of your road, or wave your hat at such a particular place, when you know what construction will be put upon it by some people within sight of you? Whatever was the original of their giving such a signification to that action of yours, would not your performance of it, in such circumstances, be equivalent to an affirmation that you saw the thing? Now, were not the miracles of Christ and his apostles such actions of God as he is not wont to perform? were they not a stepping aside out of the ordinary road of his providence? did he not know what construction would be put upon them by the world? and therefore, to say that Christ and his apostles were impostors, is it not to say, that God Almighty himself is an impostor too?

Upon the whole, it is plain, that if any thing can be

signified by actions, then God has, by innumerable actions of his, sufficiently signified to the world his approbation of the Christian religion, of the first revealers of it, and of all their extraordinary pretences. Seeing, then, he has impowered those men who pretended to have a commission from him for what they said, to do such things, in the public view of all the world, as all men must be sensible they could not have done of themselves without his extraordinary concurrence and co-operation, (which is the only way whereby any commission from one who is absent is or can be attested): Seeing he has done many things which he knew very well would be construed by the world as his approbation of the Christian religion, without any other apparent reason whatsoever for so doing: And, in a word, seeing whatever unusual and extraordinary action of God they promised to the world with this very view, he never failed punctually to perform at the very time, and with all the circumstances, that they had promised: It follows, that they who deny the Christian religion, and yet own the truth of the facts contained in the history of the New Testament, must be reduced to the necessity of maintaining, that God may give the most manifest signs of his approbation of an imposture, or, in other words, that God may lie; and that the supreme being causes error and falsehood to be accompanied with the highest circumstances of credibility, and wilfully imposes on his creatures.

This argument may be much strengthened and confirmed by considering the miracles of Christ and his apostles in another light. The strength of what has been said hitherto lies in this: That the miracles wherewith Christianity was confirmed were such works as evidently exceeded the abilities of any mere man, and plainly implied the extraordinary interposition of Heaven; such works as, tho' absolutely beyond the power of any mere man, yet Christ and his apostles promised them beforehand, and appealed to the event for the truth of their divine mission. And whatever kind these works were of, it is the same thing as to the preceding argument, provided only they had this property, that they exceeded the abi-

lities of men; but if we look a little more narrowly into them, we will find that many of them at least may be looked upon as so many instances of God's direct and express approbation of Christ and his apostles, and of their pretences likewise.

In order to set the argument for the truth of the Christian religion, drawn from this consideration, in a clear light, let it be remembered, in the first place, that God was the author of the miracles recorded in the New Testament. This I have endeavoured to prove already; and I hope there is no need for adding any thing farther upon that subject. 2dly, Let it likewise be remembered, that Christ and his apostles pretended that the religion which they taught was from God; and that they had a particular commission from God to reveal the doctrines contained in the New Testament to the world. From hence it will plainly follow, in the third place, that if the doctrines which they taught were false, if they were not from God, and if these men had no commission from him to preach them, then Christ and his apostles were most notorious cheats and impostors, who made it their chief business, not only to deceive men, and that in the most important of all their concerns, but did so in God's name; in short, were most impious and wicked wretches, and consequently were the objects of God's just hatred and displeasure. If this were the case, then it is certain, in the fourth place, that God would never have given any instances, far less numerous, public, remarkable, extraordinary instances, of his express approbation of such men; and that he would never have gone out of the ordinary road of his providence on purpose to do such things as had a direct tendency to recommend them, and their pretensions likewise, to the world. And therefore, if it shall appear that any of the miracles of Christ or his apostles were of this sort, if it shall appear that any of them were plain instances of God's express approbation of Christ or his apostles, and that they had a direct tendency to recommend their persons and their pretensions to the world, then it will follow as an unavoidable consequence, that they were not impostors, but were really what they pretended to be.

Now, there are several of the miracles recorded in the New Testament, that must at least be owned to be as plain instances as can be of God's approbation of Christ and his extraordinary pretences; particularly those that relate to his death, resurrection, and ascension, together with the conferring the gifts of the Spirit upon the apostles.

It is certain, that the miracles which happened at the time of Christ's death were of such sort, that they were by indifferent spectators taken as so many signs of God's resentment of his murder, and his approbation of his person and his cause. When Jesus yielded up the ghost, Behold, says the Evangelist Matthew, the vail of the temple was rent in twain, from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent, and the graves were opened, and many bodies of saints which slept, arose, Matth. xxvii. 51. 52. The Evangelist Luke adds to these another prodigy, namely, that the sun was darkened; so that there was darkness over all the earth from the sixth hour until the ninth hour, Luke, xxiii. 44. 45. Most of these, if not all of them, were such things as could not have happened in the ordinary course of providence, such as the rending of the vail of the temple from the top to the bottom, and the resurrection of dead bodies; and some learned men, who have given themselves the trouble to inquire into the matter, have shewed, that the darkness mentioned by Luke cannot be ascribed to any eclipse, such as frequently falls out in the ordinary course of providence, but must, with the rest of the prodigies that happened at the same time with it, be ascribed to an extraordinary interposition of God. Now, what impartial spectator, that considered all the circumstances of the case, and knew the character and pretensions of the person who was hanging upon the cross, when they saw, that as soon as ever he expired, all nature was at that very instant put as it were into a convulsion, could help making the same inference that was drawn by the centurion? Matth. xxvii. 54. Now, when the centurion, and they that were with him, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God; or, as it is expressed, Luke, xxiii. 47.

Now when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man !

But not to insist upon this, who can pretend to deny, that his resurrection, and glorious ascension into heaven, where he gave sufficient evidence of his being possessed of all that power and authority which he had laid claim to by the punctual and sensible fulfilment of a remarkable promise which he had made to his disciples concerning his bestowing upon them a great many miraculous and extraordinary powers and gifts of the Spirit ; I say, who can pretend to refuse, that all and every one of these miraculous events were undeniable instances of God's express approbation of this extraordinary person, and of all his extraordinary pretences ? Had he indeed been such a notorious cheat, such an impudent impostor, as the falsehood of his pretences would make him, certainly whenever God stepped out of the ordinary road of his providence upon his account, it would have been in order to give some remarkable evidence of his displeasure against him ? But were any of the miracles that happened upon that occasion of this sort ? We find indeed the supreme being suspending the ordinary laws of nature upon his account ; but was it not in order to his resurrection from the dead, in order to his ascension into heaven ? And let any one answer to himself, whether the raising of a person from the dead, and the taking him up to heaven, are instances of God's approbation or displeasure, especially when to the plain facts themselves are joined all the circumstances of his pretences and appeals mentioned under the preceding argument ?

And as to the gifts of the Spirit conferred upon the apostles, in so remarkable a manner, on the day of Pentecost, besides all the other circumstances of that affair, there are two of them which have each a circumstance attending it, that implies God's approbation, not only of their persons, but particularly of their cause ; I mean the gift of tongues, and the gift of healing ; the first of which Christ himself had no use for during his own personal ministry ; but as the second was likewise exer-

cised by him in an eminent manner, so what may be said upon that subject is applicable to him as well as to the apostles.

The gift of tongues that was conferred upon the apostles on that occasion, as it was a remarkable instance of God's suspending the ordinary laws of nature for the sake of the first preachers of Christianity, so it plainly implied his approbation of their cause, and his contributing to promote the success of it, seeing the plain consequence of this gift was the sudden propagation of the new religion through all the different nations and languages of the world. It cannot be denied, that the gift of tongues was a prodigious advantage to them with respect to the great design they were embarked in, and pretended to be sent upon, and did all at once put them in such a capacity for executing it as could scarcely have been attained in a course of many years by the greatest human industry and application, favoured with all the advantages requisite for that purpose; they being thereby enabled to speak to every man whom they had occasion to meet with in his own mother tongue. And is it at all likely, that the supreme being would recede so far from the ordinary course of his providence, on purpose to give so considerable an advantage to impostors?

Again, was not the gift of healing another inexpressible advantage to them in their work of converting the world? Had it not a direct influence to recommend them to the favour and love of the people wherever they went? How could these men possibly escape becoming very popular, who, by a word of their mouth, or a touch of their hand, scattered health and strength, the most valuable of earthly blessings, among the multitudes, which the expectation of these things drew after them? before whom pain and sickness, and all bodily infirmities, fled, as the shades of night do before the sun? It would have been the most unusual thing that can be, if men of such characters had not found disciples and made converts where-ever they came; I do not mean only because these cures were miracles, but likewise, more particularly, because these miracles were

cures; not only because God appeared to be in a peculiar manner with the apostles, but also because the apostles appeared to be so useful and beneficial to mankind. Who could help loving and esteeming these men by whom they were delivered from the most grievous calamities, and by whom they had the use of their limbs and their senses restored to them? Thus we find, that when the apostles, especially Peter and John, had wrought many miraculous cures, and particularly one upon a man that had been lame from his mother's womb; so high did the popularity run in their favour, that the captain and the officers who went to take them durst not lay violent hands upon them; for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned, Acts, v. 26.; and vers. 15. of that same chapter, we are told that they brought the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them. And at Lystra, after a miraculous cure of the same kind with that above mentioned, the people could scarcely be restrained from paying divine honours to Paul and Barnabas. Now, as God was plainly the author of this their miraculous power of healing, let me ask again, Is it at all likely, that the supreme being would have stepped aside out of the ordinary course of his providence on purpose to give so considerable an advantage to impostors to help them to carry on the cheat, and to give success to the imposture?

To make the sun to stand still, or to go backwards, would no doubt have been as great miracles as either the speaking such languages as one had never been taught, or the healing of the most inveterate diseases with a word, and, consequently, by the former argument, would have been a sufficient confirmation of a divine mission, if they had been done at the word of one who taught any new doctrine, and had been appealed to by him for that purpose. But then the gifts of healing and tongues are attended with this additional circumstance to their advantage, that, in a most extraordinary manner, by the one the apostles were prepared and furnished for spreading, and by the other the people were prepossessed in favour of, and prepared for giving a fa-

vourable reception to the new religion. Now, God being undeniably the author of these things that contributed so much, and by the very nature of them could not but contribute so much, to the success of Christianity, he thereby evidently discovered himself, even abstracting from any appeal on the part of the apostles, I say, he evidently discovered himself in favour of their cause.

There was another sort of miracles, whereof we meet with several instances in the Acts of the Apostles, by which God evidently discovered his approbation of them and their cause. When some of the most active and zealous preachers of the gospel were imprisoned by their enemies upon the account of their zeal and activity in that cause, and in order to put a stop to the spreading of the gospel, did not God, oftener than once, in a miraculous manner, deliver them from that confinement, and rescue them out of the hands of their enemies. In the 5th chapter of the Acts, we find, that the apostles were put in prison by the high priest, and others of the sect of the Sadducees, i. e. Deists, who, by the by, you see were persecutors of the Christians before ever it was in the power of any Christian to persecute them; but we are told, in the 19th verse of that chapter, that the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people, all the words of this life. And in the 23d verse, the officers who were sent about them reported, saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors; but when we had opened, we found no man within.

In the 12th chapter of the Acts, from the 6th verse and downwards, we have the history of a miraculous deliverance that Peter met with, who was cast into prison by Herod. Peter was not only kept between two soldiers, but was likewise bound with two chains, and the keepers before the door kept the prison, when the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison; and immediately upon his raising Peter, and bidding him follow him, the chains fell off from his hands, the iron gate which led to the city opened to

them of its own accord, and they passed all the guards without the least resistance.

Again, in the 16th chapter of the Acts, we meet with another instance of the same kind. The magistrates of Philippi, a city of Macedonia, had laid Paul and Silas in prison; and the jailor having received a strict charge about them from the magistrates, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks. But at midnight, while Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises unto God, suddenly, as we are told in the 26th verse, there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened, and every ones bands were loosed. Were not these very sensible appearances of God in favour of the apostles, and very remarkable instances of his approbation given to them, and to the cause of Christianity?

But to return to Jesus, the author of the Christian religion: What were all his extraordinary actions, but so many instances of God's approbation of him, unless they be considered as so many evidences that he himself is God? If the powers that he exerted upon so many occasions were not originally his own, (which is a question that I am not to enter upon at this time), let me ask, whether it was not a remarkable evidence of the divine approbation, that this person was plainly endowed with powers vastly superior to those that ever any of the sons of men could boast of? that he was capable to give so many instances of his having power over the most constant laws of nature, of his having the very elements under his command, and the connection between the souls and bodies of men depending upon his pleasure? Are these no evidences of his being in the favour of God? or can it be imagined, that such endowments as these would have been conferred upon a person of so vile a character as his would be upon the supposition that he was an impostor?

However, I shall wave the more particular consideration of his miracles in this view, and proceed to give three instances more of miracles recorded in the New Testament, where God did, not by actions only, but by an audible voice from heaven, explicitly

declare his approbation of Christ and the Christian religion, and did expressly command men to submit to it.

There are only two methods that we know of whereby any being can signify his pleasure to another, namely, by actions and by words. I hope it has been shewed already, that God has signified to mankind his approbation of the Christian religion, and of the first preachers of it, as plainly as can be done by actions, in the miracles that were wrought by them, or upon their account. The only thing that can be demanded farther for satisfying the most obstinate incredulity, is, that God should likewise expressly signify so much by an audible voice from heaven. And however unreasonable this demand may appear to be, yet the supreme being has condescended so far as to give us this satisfaction likewise, which will appear, if we consider what happened at Christ's baptism, at his transfiguration, and at the conversion of the Apostle Paul. Also vid. John, xii. 28.

The history of Christ's baptism we have recorded Matth. iii. 13; Mark, i. 9. 10. 11.; Luke, iii. 21. 22. In all which places we are told, that as soon as he had come up out of the water, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and there came a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.

The history of his transfiguration we have, Matth. xvii at the beginning; Mark, ix. from the 2d verse; and Luke, ix. from the 28th verse. The facts recorded in these places in short are these, that Jesus took three of his disciples, Peter, James, and John, up into an high mountain, and was transfigured before them; so that his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. And behold there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him. While Peter, being put into a confusion by the surprise of so strange and unusual a sight, was making a proposal to build three tabernacles, that they might continue there, immediately a bright cloud overshadowed them, and there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my

beloved son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him. The Apostle Peter, who was one of the witnesses of this affair, touches likewise at the circumstances of it that are most material with respect to the present purpose, in his 2d epistle, chap. i. 16. 17. 18. For we have not, says he, followed cunningly-devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye witnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard when we were with him in the holy mount. The bare recital of these passages is sufficient for my present purpose; and therefore all the remark that I shall make upon them is this, that you see not only the person, but likewise the doctrine, of Jesus is owned by heaven: Hear ye him, said the voice that came from the excellent glory.

A third instance of the approbation of Christ and the Christian religion, by an audible voice from heaven, we have in the account that is given us by Luke, in the Acts of the Apostles, of the conversion of the Apostle Paul, which is likewise recorded three times over, once in the 9th chapter by the historian, and in the 22d and 26th chapters we find it twice rehearsed by Paul himself, upon the occasion of two different apologies that he was obliged to make for himself; in which passages we are acquainted with the following particulars.

Before this accident which I am going to relate, Paul, called at that time Saul, was a most inveterate enemy to the Christians. In consequence of the violent prejudice which he had conceived against these innocent men, he procured a commission from the high priest, empowering him to apprehend such of them as he could find at Damascus, and to bring them bound to Jerusalem. With this he sets out in company with several others; but as they drew near to Damascus, all of a sudden there shined round about them a great light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, that struck a terror, as may well be imagined, into the whole company, especially into Paul himself, who not only fell upon the

ground as the rest did, but was likewise struck blind with the glory of the light, and continued so till a certain Christian was sent by God to open his eyes three days after he came to Damascus. While they were in this situation, a voice was heard, saying, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? Paul replied, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. I shall not proceed any farther in this story, when I have taken notice, that it made Paul a zealous Christian ever afterwards.

Let any one who believes the truth of these facts put the case home to himself, and imagine what effect such sensible and supernatural apparitions must necessarily have produced upon his own mind. Captious men may cavil to the end of the world at such truths as are disagreeable to their inclinations; but I am persuaded whoever will be at the pains seriously and impartially to consider the matter, and make the case his own, will be obliged to confess, that he himself would have acted the same part that Paul did, if he had been in the same circumstances. Let us suppose that one of our most zealous modern Deists had been interrupted in his studies, in the same manner that Paul was in his journey, that an excessive and insupportable light from heaven had all at once confounded and struck him blind, a voice saying to him at the same time, C——ns, C——ns, why writest thou against me, I am Jesus whom thou opposest? that after he had continued blind three days, and been sufficiently humbled, a Christian should come to him, and in the name of that Jesus who appeared to him, restore him to his sight only by touching him with his hands: how do you think he would behave? or rather make the case your own, and imagine, how you yourself would behave upon such an occasion? And yet who knows not that this is but a small part of the strong evidence wherewith the Christian religion is supported?

If it be possible for God to reveal his pleasure to men, (as it is for him to do any thing that implies not a contradiction), I would fain know by what way more proper this can be done than by the appearance of a glorious unusual light, and an intelligible voice issuing from it.

To say that every circumstance of the above-mentioned apparitions was produced by a fortuitous combination of any of the ordinary laws of motion, is (not to mention other objections) to have recourse to an hypothesis at least as absurd as Epicurus's system of the world. There must necessarily be owned something supernatural in them. To say that they may be accounted for by ascribing them to the power of evil spirits, is to say, that a wise and good governor of the world may suffer the greatest enemy of it to counterfeit him, and, in a case of the last importance, to prescribe laws to his creatures in his name, and that in such a manner as that it shall be impossible for any man to discover the cheat by any one circumstance in the whole affair; nay, it is to say, that the devil is a promoter of goodness and virtue, of love to God and man. But all these suppositions being most palpable absurdities, it is plain that God must have been the author of the above-mentioned miracles.

And if this be the case, shall it still be said, that these things are no proofs of the Christian religion? Is it no proof of it, that God has in so remarkable a manner owned the author of it, and proclaimed by a voice from heaven, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased? Is it no proof of it, that the same voice added likewise, Hear ye him? Is it no proof of it, that one of its greatest persecutors was reprov'd for the opposition he made to it by an audible voice from a glorious appearance, the excessive splendour and brightness of which struck him with blindness, till being thereby converted to Christianity, he was miraculously cured by a disciple of Jesus in the name of his master? Are these things no proofs at all of the Christian religion? Shall he be called a liar, of whom God has said, Hear ye him? Shall he be called an impostor, of whom God has said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased?

To conclude this argument, drawn from the divine approbation given to Christ and his religion by the miracles recorded in the New Testament, let me once more make a supposition parallel to the case in hand, that we may see how it would look to slight such an argument.

in any other case whatsoever. Let us suppose, that a certain person, though of never so poor an appearance, lodging perhaps in a humble cottage, and dressed in a habit of the coarsest and meanest sort, gave out, that he had received a commission from the King to his subjects in these parts of his dominions; not to insist now on his producing all the ordinary evidences that are required in a case of that nature, though this likewise should be taken in to make the supposition exactly parallel. Let us suppose, that the King was fully informed of the character that this person had taken upon him, together with the suspicions that many of his subjects entertained concerning him upon the account of the surprising meanness of his appearance, which, though there was a very wise reason for it, and though the commissioner himself had given a very satisfying account of the reason, yet was a mighty stumbling block to many, whose ideas of a King and his representative, and of external pomp and grandeur, were so jumbled together, that it was a great difficulty to separate them. Let us suppose, that after the King was fully informed of all the circumstances of the whole affair, he should, in the most public manner, give many sensible instances of a peculiar correspondence between him and the pretended commissioner, and of his extraordinary respect to and approbation of him; that he should not only send him a great many presents, but enable him likewise to scatter so many and such valuable presents among the people in all places through which he happened to pass, as no other fund but the royal coffers could possibly afford. Let us suppose that this Prince, having not only the power of touching successfully for the king's evil, but likewise of communicating the same to others, should grant this signal favour to the pretended commissioner. Let us suppose likewise, that the King himself should make him a visit in a splendid equipage, and with attendance suitable to the dignity of a King, and before his departure should be heard to say, in the presence of a sufficient number of witnesses, This is a peculiar favourite of mine, and it is my pleasure, that whatever he says be duly attended to, and meet with a suitable reception

from all my subjects. Let us suppose farther, that when, notwithstanding all this, he was imprisoned as an impostor, the King should rescue him from his confinement, and in a triumphant manner take him home to the court. Let us suppose, that after this all the extraordinary favours from the court should be bestowed upon his party, and the supporters of his pretensions; that they should be furnished immediately from the court with every thing that was necessary for promoting his interest and the success of his cause; that when they had occasion, for example, to go to such parts of the country as required the knowledge of languages that they were unacquainted with, in order to publish the contents of their patron's commission, there should be learned men sent immediately from court to instruct them, upon the King's charges, in such languages as they had occasion for, and innumerable presents furnished to them out of the royal treasury, whereby they were capable the more effectually to gain the hearts and affections of the subjects. And finally, let us suppose, that when one of their most zealous enemies was riding full speed to oppose them, the King should come upon him with his guards, strike him to the ground, and reprimand him severely in express terms, for making such opposition to his authority; and having, by this means, made him a zealous assertor of the cause he was going to oppose, should then send one of his own physicians, in the name of the above-mentioned commissioner, to cure him of his wounds, and likewise should then furnish him plentifully with all the above-mentioned assistances for propagating the new cause he has embarked in. If any Prince, especially one who had universally the character of a man of sense, and was known to manage all his affairs with the most consummate wisdom and prudence, should in such a manner espouse the interests of a commissioner and commission pretended to have come from himself, what would you think of the conduct of those who should both pretend to the character of loyal subjects, and likewise continue to oppose the so-well supported pretensions of the above-mentioned commissioner? or what would you think of the Prince, if these were

the only part of his subjects that were really in the right?

And yet, if the history of the New Testament be true, are not these the instances, or such like, nay, are not more and greater instances of the divine approbation given to the Christian religion, its author, and first preachers, by him, of whom it is said, Ps. v. 4. 5. 6. Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness; neither shall evil dwell with thee. The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity. Thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing.

ESSAY III.

A Defence of the Calvinistical Doctrine of Predestination.

[This Essay was intended to have been published in the Edinburgh Weekly Magazine, in answer to a letter signed Theophilus, which appeared in that publication in November 1768.]

S I R,

SINCE you have thought it a proper amusement for the people of Edinburgh to see the doctrine of the church of Scotland concerning the decrees of God represented as impious and blasphemous, and worthy of the utmost abhorrence and detestation; may I not hope, that the establishment of that doctrine by the laws of the land will intitle it to as fair a hearing as this violent attack upon it has already obtained? This is all we plead for: a clear stage, and no favour.

Only I must put your correspondent Theophilus in mind, that "shuddering with horror," and calling names, such as "impious and blasphemous," are no fair arguments. These things are but too easily, and indeed too frequently retorted. Far be it from me, however, to be the retorter.

Any thing like arguing in his letter might have been prevented, had he sufficiently attended to a distinction which is explicitly or implicitly made by all his opponents who do not espouse the doctrine of physical predetermination, or maintain the hypothesis of a necessity that is inconsistent with man's being a free, i. e. a moral agent, or an accountable creature. Such of them as are of that opinion I will not take upon me to defend: but it is certain that the bulk of those who are usually

called Calvinists are by no means of that way of thinking; and particularly, neither the synod of Dort, nor the Westminster assembly. On the contrary, it is expressly affirmed, (Confession of Faith, ch. 9. § 1.), that "God hath endued the will of man with that natural liberty, that it is neither forced, nor by any absolute necessity of nature determined, to good or evil." In consequence of this, they necessarily must, and actually do distinguish between the decrees of God. He has indeed, according to them, from all eternity, fixed, and unalterably ordained (for he is not a man that he should repent) whatsoever comes to pass; but in a very different manner. There are some things that he decreed to *do*, and there are some things that he decreed to *permit*, a word that conveys a very different idea, and sets the matter in quite another light, than what Theophilus seems to have viewed it in. This, however, is the term which the compilers of the Westminster Confession have chosen for expressing their sentiments upon this subject, ch. 6. § 1. where, speaking of our first parents eating the forbidden fruit, it is said, "This their sin God was pleased, according to his wise and holy counsel, to *permit*, having purposed to order it to his own glory."

If Theophilus be of opinion, that sins cannot be reckoned among those events which God determined even to permit, he would oblige one, if not more of your readers, in conveying, through your paper, his answers to the following queries.

1. Was it known to God before the world began, that men would commit such and such sins? "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world." But are not many of God's own works, in the strictest sense of the word, the effects of mens sins? Did he know, before he made the earth, that he *would* curse the ground for man's sake? that he would, after some hundreds of years, destroy it, and almost all its inhabitants, by the waters of a flood? that he would rain fire and brimstone from heaven upon Sodom and Gomorrah, and turn the fine country about them into a noisome lake? &c. And did he not know *wherefore* he was to do so? Can it be imagined that the *sins* of men, which were the true *causes* of such terrible judge-

ments, with all their circumstances and heinous aggravations, were unknown to God when he determined to punish them in so remarkable a manner?

If the sins, and all the most contingent actions of rational creatures that depend upon the exercise of their wills, are not known, or not *certainly* known, to God before the events happen, is it consistent with the least degree of prudence for so wise a being to hazard his credit, if I may so speak, by foretelling, in the most positive terms, hundreds of years before the events, and before the actors were born, things that might either be, or might not be? Upon what a number of contingencies or determinations of the wills of moral agents, most of which, perhaps, are sinful ones, do the revolutions of kingdoms depend? And yet are not many of the most important future revolutions so graphically described by Daniel, that the ancient enemies of Christianity were forced to alledge, that the prophecies ascribed to him must have been written after the events came to pass? I need not insist on the precise number of seventy years specified by Jeremiah, during which the Jewish captivity was to continue, nor upon the very person who was to issue the edict for their return, and the rebuilding of the temple, being pointed out by *name*, long before his birth, in the prophecies of Isaiah, with many other examples of the same nature: let me only ask, Does not God himself pawn his credit for the certain accomplishment of such predictions, and fix upon this as the criterion to distinguish between him and the false deities of the Heathens? See Deut. xviii. 21. 22.; Is. xli. 21.—23.

The Socinian writers, who are the most consistent, as well as the shrewdest disputants against the doctrines of religion, do readily yield, that as the omnipotence of God extends to all things that are possible, so his omniscience extends to all things that are knowable; that therefore he knows all truths: but they deny that the certain futurity of a free action is a truth, and therefore they maintain that it is not knowable. If Theophilus agrees with them, (for I must suppose him consistent till the contrary appears), I ask him, Whether before Judas betrayed Christ, and Peter denied him, it was a

truth, that they should respectively behave in that manner? When Christ told Peter that he would thrice deny him, that apostle had the presumption to contradict him. And was the contradiction of the one, and the affirmation of the other, really upon a level? Was it an equal chance, that what was positively asserted by him *who knew all things* (as the same apostle afterwards acknowledged) might be, or might not be? Does not our Lord's express assertion necessarily imply, that it was then a truth, that Peter would deny him, and that Judas would betray him? nay, without having recourse to implication, does not Christ directly inform us it was then a truth, that Peter would deny him, and that Judas would betray him, when, in both cases, he affirmed it with a verily, verily? as much as if he had said, "It is a truth, I assure you, it is a truth;" and consequently knowable, John, xiii. 21. 38. Nay, does he not, in the 18th verse of that same chapter, point out a passage in the Psalms where the sin of Judas was foretold? Was not then the futurity thereof a truth knowable a thousand years before he was born?

2. Let me ask, If, in that plan of providence which the supreme being has preferred to every other series of events that may be supposed obvious to the divine intellect, if, I say, in that plan which he has actually chosen, he could not but distinctly perceive the whole consequences, and particularly innumerable sins of men, and yet gave it his divine and omnipotent *fiat*; was not this effectually fixing every event, even the most sinful one, and that unalterably, seeing with him there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning? What is it that makes us so often change our mind, and alter our plans, but our short-sightedness, not being able, at a single glance, to penetrate into the remotest consequences of things? But is the same ignorance, and the like imperfect views, to be imputed to him before whom all things are naked and open? If he perceived all the consequences of his plan, and every the minutest circumstance that was to happen in the execution of it, had he it not in his power to chuse another? and would he not have done it, had he judged it, on the whole, to be better? Could he not have made man of a dif-

ferent nature from what he is or ever was? or preserved him in his innocence, by such degrees of grace as would have been consistent with the liberty of a moral agent? But is not the divine selection of this very plan that is actually put in execution, a sufficient evidence, that whatever disorders may appear to our narrow views and imperfect comprehension, yet the infallibly wise God did judge it best, upon the whole, to do or permit whatever comes to pass.

I must therefore beg the favour of Theophilus to let us know more particularly what is the idea that he conceives of the matter: whether he thinks, that when God made the world, and placed man in it, this (as well as innumerable other determinations, which, on his hypothesis, the will of the supreme being must, by unforeseen events, often be led to) was the effect of a new and sudden resolution, the whole consequences of which he did not thoroughly perceive? Or if he allows, that, from all eternity, God was determined to do what he has done, with an infallible and comprehensive view of every the smallest circumstance that was to arise during the whole progress of execution; let him tell us, whether, and how, he can refuse to admit all that we maintain upon the subject? or rather, if this be not really admitting it? He is shocked at the expression of *every event being unalterably fixed*, as all the sins of men must be included; and he has reason to be so, if, instead of God's infallibly foreseeing such events as the consequences of what he himself was to do, and determining to permit them, he understands it to mean, that God was determined, by his own immediate efficiency, to produce them. But is the expression which Theophilus is so shocked at, as it stands, any stronger than the words of inspired writ? How great was the sin of crucifying Christ! yet says Peter, "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain;" Acts, ii. 23. Again, speaking of the same heinous wickedness, he says, in an address to God, that it was doing "whatever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done;" Acts, iv. 28. And again, "But those things which God before had

“ shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ
 “ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled ;” Acts, iii. 18.
 Has the gentleman read these passages without shuddering
 with horror ? And yet the expressions there used
 are directly, and not by implication only, applied to sin-
 ful actions, and are obviously rather stronger than what
 appears to him to be impious and blasphemous.

3. I wish the gentleman would inform us what good
 purposes can be served by representing as impious and
 blasphemous, a truth so obvious from the very light
 of nature, that there is no rejecting it, without concei-
 ving the supreme being to be extremely limited in his
 knowledge, narrow and short-sighted in his views of fu-
 turity, like a finite and fallible creature ? and that,
 when he makes a world, he is working in the dark, and
 really acting at random, not knowing what disappoint-
 ments he will meet with, what unexpected events may
 surprise him, and disconcert his plan, or what will be
 all the consequences of the workmanship of his own
 hands ; and a truth (allow me to say) which, after all
 the ingenious arts of criticism that have been employed
 to erase it, still continues to stare us in the face out of
 the Bible. What can be the effect of so solemnly abju-
 ring it, and endeavouring to expose it to so much ab-
 horrence and detestation, but to raise doubts of the au-
 thority of that revelation it is so inseparably inter-
 woven with, and at length even of natural religion it-
 self ?

If the argument necessarily leads to disagreeable con-
 sequences, that is what I cannot help, if I argue at all ;
 but the mere calling names, and shuddering with horror,
 is only *scolding*, not *reasoning*.

As for the influence that either his or our doctrine
 may have upon the practice of those who embrace it,
 which the gentleman seems to be concerned for, as if
 the one was calculated to lull people into a careless se-
 curity about their salvation, and the other to rouse them
 into religious diligence, it would be easy to show, that
 all this flows from his not knowing what the doctrine is
 that he opposes. But the surest and shortest decision of
 the question is to be had from fact and experience, to
 which we are not afraid to appeal. I believe it will be

allowed, that, in the reformed churches, and particularly in Britain, there was as much appearance of concern about salvation, and of serious diligence in religion, at and some time after the Reformation, as there is at this day. But let the gentleman himself say, what doctrine did then universally prevail? Arminianism (it is well known) first crept into England among the *Laudean* faction, who, in the civil war, adhered to the King; while the Parliament and their adherents opposed it with great zeal. And what were the characters of the two parties with respect to the practice of religion? Mr Baxter, who was a cotemporary witness, tells us, in the history of his life and times, that the war was very improperly called *Bellum Episcopale*: for, says he, "thousands that wished for *good Bishops* were on the Parliament's side; but the generality of those who were called *Puritans and Precisians*, and were for serious godliness, adhered to the Parliament: on the other hand, they who were for looseness, swearing, gaming, and drinking, &c. these adhered all along to the King." Upon the Restoration, the Arminians recovered the ground they had lost; and from that time their doctrine became rampant in the church of England. Would to God we had not so severely felt what an inundation of profanity and licentiousness, infidelity and contempt of serious godliness, broke in with it at the same time!

As I have not room to pursue the comparison any farther, I shall only ask, whether there is any appearance of serious diligence in religion being remarkably increased among us since the prevalence of Arminian principles in this church? And with respect to Scotland, as well as other places, both in Europe and America, allow me to put another question: When, or where-ever, there has been any more than ordinary concern about salvation, visible reformation of life, and remarkable diligence in religion excited, by the preaching of what doctrine have these desirable effects been brought about? the orthodox or the Arminian? I know that when the gospel has any very sensible and striking effect on some, this seldom fails to be accompanied with a great many false

and hypocritical pretences in others; and there are not a few who seem disposed to lay hold on this last effect, in order to disparage the other. But notwithstanding all this, I ask, What sort of doctrine it is that has usually produced both the substance and the shadow?

Nor perhaps would the argument suffer on our side, were the comparison to be run between the Jansenists and the Jesuits in the church of Rome, the followers of Augustine and those of Pelagius in more primitive times, the Essenes and the Sadducees among the Jews, or between the Stoics and the Epicureans among the ancient Heathens; though it is certain, that some of those who are here mentioned carried the point much farther than we do.

It is not possible to obviate all the objections that may arise upon this subject within the narrow bounds allowed for a performance of this kind; but if any reader inclines to go farther into the matter, and to see the above principles applied to the orthodox doctrine, either of election, which is one of those things that God decrees to *do*, or reprobation, which is founded on what he foresees, and has good reasons for *permitting*, I shall only recommend to him a book of M. la Placette, intitled, *Reponse à une objection-qu'on applique à divers sujets, et qui tend à faire voir que si Dieu a résolu les evenemens, on peut negliger les soins qui paroissent les plus necessaires*; and perhaps upon a careful perusal thereof, many who have seen no more upon the subject but the superficial declamations of some English divines against a tenet which they have subscribed their own assent to, will be surpris'd to find the orthodox doctrine, not only the true scriptural, but the only rational account of the matter.

E S S A Y IV.

Reasons against excluding from Sealing Ordinances such as scruple to ask a certificate from one who has been ordained in the parish to which they belong, in opposition to the declared inclination of the parish.

I. **T**His is the most flagrant incroachment upon the right of private judgement that a church-judicatory is capable of. There is no avoiding the force of this argument, without maintaining, either that private judgement or conscience is not concerned in that instance of peoples conduct that is so severely censured, — or that they have no right to the exercise of their own private judgement, — or that the exercise of it is not restrained by the above-mentioned censure, as far as it is in the power of a church-judicatory to restrain it; — and therefore this argument cannot be better illustrated than by considering those only refuges by which it may be evaded.

To begin with the last, I dare say it is what no body will insist upon; for if inflicting the highest penalty that we have in our power to execute upon the commission of a supposed crime, be not a discouraging and restraining the exercise of private judgement; and (in the case of any good right on the part of the supposed criminals to act as they did) if this be not, with a witness, a most enormous and flagrant incroachment upon that right, there can be, surely, no more any meaning in words. Church-judicatories have it not, and ought not to have it, in their power to enforce their sentences with civil penalties,

This at least is in fact the case of the judicatories of the church of Scotland; and I wish, for their own sakes, that they would not afford tender consciences so much ground to bless God that it is so. The only methods by which they can give a check to whatever they disapprove of, are such as affect, not the bodies or estates, but the consciences of men, and regard them in their religious capacity; such as, reasoning or expostulating with them, admonishing, rebuking them, more privately or more publicly; and when they think it proper to proceed to the utmost extremity, it is by refusing to regard them any longer as Christians, or to admit them to a participation of those ordinances that are the peculiar privileges of that religious society. We cannot, without the help of the secular arm, drive any body from hearing sermons, and joining in the ordinary parts of the public worship; but if we will not baptise their children, or admit them to the sacrament of the Lord's supper, they are no doubt, though not perhaps so formally, yet as really excommunicated as ever the most incestuous adulterer was, or the profane and most avowed infidel ought to be.

—It is usually thought, that the right of private judgement, and liberty of conscience, was not so well understood, or so carefully attended to, in this church, about 100 years ago, as that matter has been since. It must at least be allowed, that there was then a combination of circumstances that do seldom concur, which both tempted and facilitated the screwing up of church-power perhaps somewhat beyond its proper bounds. And indeed the case is now so altered in many respects, and particularly both as to the popularity of our measures among the lower, and as to the countenance that may be expected from the higher part of the laity, that I cannot think even of our imitating every experiment that they durst venture to try, (not to speak of going so far beyond them), without being put in mind of the fable of the spaniel and ass. But with all the authority which our General Assemblies in that period arrived at, and without any dissenting congregations of Protestants for those who might be disgusted to shelter

themselves in, they did not think fit to carry the matter this length. The act of Assembly 1647, against such as withdraw themselves from the public worship in their own congregation, I believe, is the severest that was made upon that subject. But though it is highly probable, that the want of a pastoral relation could not then be so justly alledged as it is frequently now; yet that *moderate* Assembly (I must call them so, in comparison with some amongst us at this day) prescribe several other means, indeed, for the remedy of that inconvenience; but do not seem to have thought of the short work with it that is now prescribed. With this view, they appoint the minister of the parish to be diligent in his duty. And with respect to the deserters, they appoint them to be instructed, to be admonished; and if these means prove ineffectual, they appoint them to be cited, and censured by the session; and if the matter be not taken order with there, that it be brought to the presbytery. But any farther they do not adventure to say; though a summary interdict would have very much compendified these tedious methods. So much greater regard was paid, even in these triumphant days of church-authority, to the privileges of sincere, though scrupulous Christians; and so much safer was it then to follow one's own private opinion, than it is now, when free thinking is so much boasted of, and, if I am not mistaken, even by some who are the authors of those measures.

If it was not for what has been last mentioned, I should now proceed to illustrate the second branch of the argument, by showing, that this right of private judgement, which is not only restrained, but restrained with so very high a hand, is a right that undoubtedly belongs to every private Christian. But as those who are guilty of this incroachment are not only Protestants, but some of them, I believe, pretend to understand and value this Protestant principle even beyond others of the same denomination, I make no question but they would take it as an affront to suppose them either ignorant of, or disputing it: So that I can think of no other way of evading the force of this argument, but by having recourse to the first pretence, and alledging, that people

cannot desert the ministry of one who has been ordained in the parish to which they belong, from any thing else but mere obstinacy and ill-nature; and, in a word, that this is a case where conscience and private judgement are not at all concerned; and therefore I have reserved this to be considered in the last place.

Indeed, if I did not know that this is in fact the evasion that recourse is had to, and if I could perceive any other way of evading the force of the argument that had the least appearance of serving the purpose, I could scarcely suspect it of any reasonable man, that he would make use of so poor a shift. For it is certain, that if ever private judgement is at all to be exercised, or conscience to interpose, it is when there is a necessity of a private personal decision one way or other, i. e. when the person cannot avoid acting either one way or another. I can suppose innumerable cases of ecclesiastical decisions, in which the consciences of private Christians are not at all concerned. Suppose the General Assembly should amuse themselves with deciding an hundred speculative points of divinity or philosophy, a private Christian, tho' he may wish them better employed, yet if his assent to these decisions is not demanded, would find his own conscience very little concerned in the matter. In like manner, let them give what judgement they will, in absolving or condemning such as are prosecuted before them, in planting or vacating other parishes, all this may be right, or it may be wrong; he finds himself under no necessity to examine the merits of, or to give a decision in his own mind, upon any of these questions. But if the congregation that is planted with a minister is that whereof he is a member, in that case, there is no help for it; determine he must, one way or other, either to submit to his ministry or not: So that this (if there is any such thing) must undoubtedly be a case of private judgement; and conscience, if ever it be allowed at any time, must upon this occasion pronounce the decision.

But perhaps it will be alledged, that the case is so clear, and the absurdity so manifest, in refusing submission, that nothing but prejudice and perverseness can be supposed to influence any body in choosing that side of the question. Why possibly the case might be clear,

and the absurdity manifest, to you or to me; but it is neither to you nor to me to whom the decision belongs; and what else can be the consequence of substituting our light in the place of another man's, but that there must be an end of private judgement altogether? For it is easy at first sight to perceive, that if this pretence on the side of authority were once allowed, there would be no occasion for denying the *right*, in order to suppress the exercise of private judgement in all cases whatsoever: the one will do the business every whit as effectually as the other. And indeed there are but too many instances to be given of tender consciences being actually oppressed with the weight of an authority, that, instead of attributing to itself infallibility, has chosen to gain the same point, only by loading with the imputation of obstinacy those who had a scruple about submitting to any of the dictates thereof. How often have the high clergy of the church of England abused the Dissenters for pretending conscience in their scruples against the ceremonies of human invention in the worship of God! Is it to be imagined, that they would debar them from the two sacraments, if they did not impute their aversion at the sign of the cross in the one, and the posture of kneeling in the other, to mere stubbornness and obstinacy? And how easy were it for the church of Rome, too, to put the case of *transubstantiation* itself, with all the severities it has occasioned, upon the same footing, if they had not the more tenible fort of an avowed infallibility to take shelter in? Nay, even with this advantage, is not the same charge actually brought against the Protestants on this head, and that by men of no less reputation for parts, learning, and even moderation, than M. Arnaird and M. Nicole?

The truth is, whatever side of a question any man takes, if he has thought ever so little upon the subject, it is only what is alledged on his own side that he perceives any real strength in; and he must needs judge all the grounds of the contrary opinion to be but weak, and without any good foundation. From hence the gradation is easy, to judge them that have no better arguments for an opinion which they seem to espouse to be actuated by something else than the reasonableness there-

of, which to him appears nothing at all. This will the rather happen to those who fix their views only on one side of a question; which seldom fails to be the case when questions occur that have any thing interesting in them with respect to our present temporal views, where one's own power and authority, or the ease and credit of our friends and partisans, is concerned.

Let us, however, examine the matter a little more closely. It is not unusual to meet with the hardest words, when there is the greatest penury of argument to support them. And indeed the last is evidently a matter of such superior consequence, that when I find great attention paid to the first, I cannot help suspecting violently that it is for want of the other. How far this is applicable here, may be judged from what follows. The principles that are thought so absurd, and the falsity of which is supposed to be so manifest, are,

1. "That the consent at least of a congregation is necessary to establish a pastoral relation between them and their minister." Now it is very true that the council of Trent has cursed them that say so *; and all those who embrace this principle must no doubt take their hazard of this curse. But will any Protestant, or indeed any man, pretend to say, that it is impossible for any body seriously to believe *that*, which was the constant principle of the primitive church, and the universal rule of their practice; and that not only down to the times of Gregory, as appears from his letters, but as some think, not improbably, down to the 13th century? *that*, which is the declared opinion of so many fathers and councils? It would be endless to collect testimonies upon this subject, and likewise superfluous, being acknowledged by the Popish writers themselves, as to the universal practice at least, particularly by Bellarmine, and by Pomeilius, in his notes on Cyprian's Epistles. Does not Chrysostom expressly pronounce all elections made without the knowledge and consent of the people to be null and void? lib. 3. *De sacerdotibus*. I might oppose to the council of Trent that of Nice, that of the 3d, 4th, and 5th

* Si quis dixerit ordines ab Episcopis collatos sine populi vel secularis potestatis consensu aut vocatione irritos esse, anathema sit.

councils of Carthage, not to mention a great many other testimonies, which it is needless to trouble the reader with, upon a point that will not I dare say be disputed.

Besides, can it be pretended that no body is capable of being really persuaded of that which our reformers generally maintained in opposition to the church of Rome, and which brought upon them the above-mentioned curse from the council of Trent; what most of the reformed churches who did not retain other vicious parts of the Romish constitution have always thought worth the stickling for? With respect to the church of Scotland, if any regard is to be had to the testimony of the General Assembly 1736, act 14. "It is, and has been since the Reformation, the principle of this church, that no minister shall be intruded into any parish contrary to the will of the congregation." And in proof that it has been always so, they quote a series of the most authentic testimonies through all the various periods when this church had opportunity to make her sentiments publicly known, particularly "act of assembly, August 6. 1575, Second Book of Discipline, chap. 3. par. 4. 6. & 8. registrate in the assembly-books, and appointed to be subscribed by all ministers, and ratified by acts of parliament, and likewise the act of assembly 1638, December 17. & 18. and assembly 1715, act 9."

And indeed the standing forms of this church, one should think, might be sufficient to declare, not only what were the sentiments of those who first established them, but likewise what are the sentiments of all those who are serious in still using them, and are not so cruelly disposed as to jest with men in matters wherein they themselves are constantly advising them to be in earnest. Those churches that declare the people's consent to be unnecessary, do not pretend to ask it, or insult them by gathering the suffrages of people whose concern in the matter is not to be regarded; whereas it is the universal practice of the church of Scotland, even when there is a presentation in the case, to appoint with great solemnity the moderation of a call, after an advertisement very formally published ten free days before hand, as if

there really was something in the matter. The voices are carefully marked by a clerk, and reported to the presbytery by some of their own reverend members, who have been solemnly commissioned by the court, shall I say, to play this farce. A paper, intitled, *A call from the parish*, is put into the hands of the candidate, wherein he is intreated to take the charge of their souls; and submission to him is restipulated on the other side. And is it nothing but perverseness and obstinacy that hinders people from perceiving that all this is barbarously intended only to mock them? and that men who would be thought grave and serious, are ludicrously diverting themselves with their most important concerns? But whatever these forms may have at length degenerated into, does not the very establishment of them look something like as if the consent of a parish had once been seriously thought necessary by some body? And surely what has been may be. It cannot, I should think, be impossible for some still to be of that opinion which the whole Christian church was of till the man of sin was fully revealed, and since the Reformation, till very lately, all but Romanists and Romanising Protestants.

2. Another of those principles which the excommunicated people proceed upon is, "That the decision of a General Assembly cannot alter the nature of a thing, or make that which is in itself wrong to be right." This I take to be so far from being of that degree of absurdity as to be absolutely incredible, that I doubt if any Protestant will pretend to dispute it. There have been many disputes about the extent of ecclesiastical authority, and the measures of submission due to it from private Christians, not only between Papists and Protestants, but likewise between the church of England and most of the other Protestant churches in Christendom, occasioned by the imposition of ceremonies that are acknowledged not to be of divine institution. And indeed there are few men that believe in any church, or in any society, who, when once they get any sort of power into their own hands, do not seem inclinable to make the most of it, and to stretch it as far as it will go: and yet of all the highest and fiercest contenders for ecclesiastical authority, even among the rigidest ceremony-mong-

ers, I do not remember that any one Protestant writer pleads for active obedience to it, but where the things enjoined are allowed either to be right, or at least in their own nature indifferent; and therefore I cannot allow myself to suspect, (notwithstanding the obvious difference in men's language upon the subject of church-power, when it is, and when it is not exercised by themselves), that it is here where any part of the absurdity will be fixed.

3. The people who are so hardly used are of opinion, "That the ordaining one to be pastor of a congregation which has loudly and openly declared against him, is not only wrong, even though it should be the deed of a General Assembly, but they believe it to be a matter of high importance, and especially when a course of such decisions seems to threaten the establishment of an universal rule or practice of this sort, they think it affects in the deepest manner the interests of practical religion, and has the directest tendency to render the ordinance of the ministry useless, if not pernicious." They imagine that such is the present state of mankind, that with all the advantages the very best ministers can have on their side, there is but too much ground to complain of their want of success; and therefore they cannot help dreading, that this little success will be farther lessened by the establishment of a method of settling ministers, which not only introduces them to their charge under the most disadvantageous circumstances, but likewise exposes congregations to the hazard of being really worse provided, i. e. of having ministers thrust in upon them, not only under circumstances the most unfavourable for promoting the edification of the people, but who are themselves of such characters as are the least promising of success in the only design that ought to be in view.

That the thrusting in a minister over the belly of a congregation does actually raise the strongest prejudices against him, will surely not be denied; as this is not only a notour fact, but the very fact that has afforded occasion for the present dispute; and therefore I cannot think any body will pretend that there is the least impossibility in believing it. How far the other suspicion is well founded, is a question that will not perhaps be so

easily decided. But if, even among such as have been licensed by a presbytery, there may be a distinction made to the great benefit of religion, I do not see how this can be done but by those whose inclinations must determine the planting of a vacant congregation. And the only question here is, whether this may be done with most advantage by trusting it altogether to patrons, or by having some regard likewise to the consent of the people? i. e. whether one who probably has some dependent on himself, or on some of his friends, to provide for, or a people who are to live under the ministry of him whom they call, who with their families are to be instructed and edified by him, who want him not only to preach the gospel to them, and to lead their public devotions, but to exercise church government and discipline among them, to admonish, rebuke, and comfort them, as occasion requires. The question is, Which of these may be supposed to have the most regard in their choice to the qualifications of a candidate; whether he whose chief interest in the matter is to have a certain person provided with a parish; or they whose chief interest in the matter is to have a certain parish provided with a minister? If there could be any doubt still remaining as to the decision of this question, one should think the conduct of the patrons themselves might be sufficient to remove it, who are every day making the case plainer, by insisting on the settlement of their presentees, even after it is apparent that they can be of very little use in the parishes to which they are presented, without so much as pretending to conceal, that if the presentee be only put in possession of the benefice, this is the single point they had in view; and as to the rest, that they have no farther concern about the matter. And if human nature on the north side of Tweed has any resemblance of the same human nature on the south side of that river, can there be any question, whether any difference of character we have yet to boast of in the presentees on this side is not entirely owing to the part which the people yet pretend to in their settlement; and that whenever the disposal of the benefice comes to be in an equal degree the absolute, uncontrollable, and undisputed property of the patron,

it will not likewise be sold to the most abandoned and worthless simoniacal wretches?

However, let these points be decided which way they will, for I shall not dispute with any man whether he is capable of believing that a parish is likely to be better provided by one that is perhaps at the distance of one hundred miles, and who never was and never will be in the church, and perhaps not much in any other, than by the people of that congregation themselves, who have an interest in the matter; or whether he is capable of believing that people have a better chance of being edified by a minister whom they run away from, and whom they regard with the most violent prejudices, than by one to whom they have given their own consent, whose ministrations they peaceably attend, and listen to with reverence and regard. Possibly those who are for exercising the disputed discipline upon the people may really believe all this themselves. But the only question at present is, not where the truth lies in these points, but whether the people are capable of really believing, that they are more likely to be edified by one whom they have a favourable impression of, than by one whom they have an aversion to, and that if their inclinations were consulted, it would be a likelier way to be provided with a good man, than when the affair is left entirely to the discretion of a patron: and really if there is any man to whom the decision of this precise question may not be left, for my part I shall not pretend to argue with him; but if violent settlements may be regarded by the people in this light, they may consequently be supposed to look upon the establishment of such a method as a matter of the highest importance, that threatens the utter destruction of any remains we have yet among us of real religion, and the rendering the ordinance of the ministry not only useless, but hurtful and contemptible.

4. From all this the people infer, that whatever others may have the freedom to do, it would be highly criminal in them to have an active hand in promoting and encouraging what appears to them to be the ruin of Christianity and of practical religion. They reckon, that their owning one that has been violently intruded upon them is an encouragement of the thing, and that they can-

not more directly and formally own him for their minister, than by asking a certificate from him as a condition of their being admitted to sealing ordinances. That their quiet submission to one whom they look upon as an intruder would be some encouragement to, and render the establishment of this method the easier, must be owned by all who know, that however there are some who make light of their opposition, and seem to be perfectly indifferent whether a minister is to be useful or not; yet there are others, and that not a few, members of assembly, who are unwilling to appoint a settlement when there is no reasonable prospect of its serving the purpose. As to the other point, they are of opinion, that the receiving of sealing ordinances from the man's own hand who pretends to be their minister, is not so direct an owning him for such, as the applying to him for a certificate to another. For, say they, when such a thing is demanded of them, we can take the one from any minister of Christ, but the other from none but our own. To receive a sacrament, of which he is the dispenser, implies only the supposition of his ordination being valid, which we do not deny; but to apply for a licence from him, implies the supposition of a pastoral relation, which we do deny. And if there are any who would dispute this with them, I cannot think it will be those who are for driving them to it by such rigorous measures, which have the directest tendency to confirm them in this apprehension. For if it be only as a neighbour, who has an opportunity to know their character, that the minister's line is insisted on, why are they so entirely limited to him? May not the attestation of another neighbour, particularly of an elder, who has better opportunities to know them, do quite as well?

Lastly, They think that a man's consenting to be ordained in a parish where he has not the consent of the people, is an evidence of so little concern for their edification, that they cannot expect to profit by his ministry. They think, that as the care of their own souls, which will be required at their own hands, and consequently is incumbent upon every particular person himself, intitles them to chuse their religion, and not to take it upon trust from any man, or from any body of

men; so it intitles them likewise to the choice of the pastor whose assistance they think proper to use in this most important and personal of all their concerns. They think, that one of the most essential qualifications that should direct them in this choice, is one's having the great end of his office, viz. the salvation of their souls, seriously at heart, and a deep concern for their edification, and particularly the discovering, in his own practice, that he is in earnest in recommending to them a preference of spiritual and eternal, to present and temporal things. They imagine, that one cannot more palpably discover the want of those qualifications, than by accepting a benefice annexed to the cure of souls, when he sees that the last is withdrawn from the first, and by acting a part which he cannot but know must greatly obstruct their edification, nay, which he must have seen in other instances involve many unthinking people in much sin and wickedness, viz. hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, &c. that, in all likelihood, it will drive some into schism, and to follow teachers who will rankle and embitter their hearts, and poison them with a spirit diametrically opposite to that of Christianity; that it will drive others into profanity, and a neglect and contempt of the worship of God, and the means of their salvation; in a word, that it will scatter, divide, and expose to perdition, that flock which he should gather, and feed, and protect from injuries and dangers. And having, upon these considerations, used that liberty, which they think none has any right to divest them of, in withholding their consent to a pastoral relation with such a person, they think it inconsistent with truth even virtually to acknowledge what they know not to be fact.

These are the principles upon which the people proceed: and though I will not venture to say, that they are all just, particularly as to the two last; yet I will venture to say, that they have such a degree of plausibility, and seem to hang together in so natural a series, that if there is any man capable of confining his views of a thing to one side of it, he is capable of regarding them all as indubitable truths. I for my own part have known so many instances even of honest minds being

led by a combination of circumstances into a way of thinking that appeared extremely wrong and extremely absurd to others, that I dare not, for this very reason, draw the same inference that is mentioned in the last particular from the conduct of some who have accepted and driven on violent settlements. But I frankly acknowledge, that it is by no means any surprise to me, that others, who view the thing in the same light that I do, and have not had equal opportunities, nor been so much accustomed to reflect upon the variety of lights in which the same thing may appear to different minds, do not at all stick to draw the inference. In like manner, when I consider the consequences on the one side as well as on the other, I look upon the reasonings mentioned in the preceding article as too hasty conclusions, drawn without maturely enough examining and pondering all the circumstances of the thing. But I do think, that of all others they whose reputation suffers by those hasty inferences, and partial views of things, are the least intitled to call in question the possibility of that whereof themselves are such flagrant examples. I am sure at least, that I have occasion for all the observations that I have made of the variety there is in the turn of mens minds, the different lights in which the same thing is capable of appearing, and the possibility even of an honest man's viewing things but by halves, in order to support my opinion of their honesty.

The question, then, upon the whole, comes to this, Whether it is utterly inconsistent with an honest mind to overlook any circumstance that ought to have weight in forming our judgement of a thing. If it is not, which I believe will not at this time be disputed; and if it is supposed possible for an honest man's thoughts to be led by certain circumstances to run only in the train that has been laid down, I think it cannot be denied, that a truly conscientious person may, in the honest exercise of his private judgement, be exposed to this terrible thunderbolt of ecclesiastic tyranny.

But perhaps it will be alledged, that it is not the gross absurdity of these principles, or the impossibility of any body's being seriously persuaded of them, from whence the obstinacy and perverseness of these people

is inferred; but that it appears from the whole tenor of their behaviour, the unchristian passions they actually give vent to, and the other unwarrantable practices they indulge themselves in. — To which I reply,

1st, It is impossible that any particular instances of this, though ever so numerous, ever so obvious, or well vouched, can vindicate a general rule, that extends not only to the persons known to behave in this manner, but to others, who, for ought that can be pretended to be known, may be moved by nothing but a serious and conscientious scruple; nay, even to many whose conduct being yet in futurity, no guesses can be made by any charitable man, what passions may influence or be intermixed with it. It seems to be none of the fairest or candidest ways of reasoning, to conclude, that because I know some instances of people in a certain way of thinking that do evidently betray their being under the influence of passion and prejudice, therefore all others that fall into the same way of thinking can be acted from nothing else. There is but too good ground to suspect, that many of the first Antinomians that appeared in Germany were led into that pernicious doctrine through a love of licentiousness, and an impatience of the restraints of God's law. But is this a sufficient ground to infer, that therefore no man can fall into that opinion, without being acted by the same motives?

If this sort of reasoning was to pass current, there is not upon the face of the earth a religion that would be out of the reach of its malignant influence. May not one be even a Christian through perverseness and obstinacy? The Apostle Paul not only affirms, that some preached Christ even of envy and strife, supposing to add affliction to his bonds; but he supposes it possible even for one to give his body to be burned from some other motive than a true love to God and man. And must all the preachers of, and all the martyrs for Christianity, be thought to be acted by the same unworthy motives? Is it to be imagined, that among the whole nations that fell in with the Reformation, there were not many individuals that were moved by unwarrantable passions? and that King Henry VIII. of England

led by a combination of circumstances into a way of thinking that appeared extremely wrong and extremely absurd to others, that I dare not, for this very reason, draw the same inference that is mentioned in the last particular from the conduct of some who have accepted and driven on violent settlements. But I frankly acknowledge, that it is by no means any surprise to me, that others, who view the thing in the same light that I do, and have not had equal opportunities, nor been so much accustomed to reflect upon the variety of lights in which the same thing may appear to different minds, do not at all stick to draw the inference. In like manner, when I consider the consequences on the one side as well as on the other, I look upon the reasonings mentioned in the preceding article as too hasty conclusions, drawn without maturely enough examining and pondering all the circumstances of the thing. But I do think, that of all others they whose reputation suffers by those hasty inferences, and partial views of things, are the least intitled to call in question the possibility of that whereof themselves are such flagrant examples. I am sure at least, that I have occasion for all the observations that I have made of the variety there is in the turn of mens minds, the different lights in which the same thing is capable of appearing, and the possibility even of an honest man's viewing things but by halves, in order to support my opinion of their honesty.

The question, then, upon the whole, comes to this, Whether it is utterly inconsistent with an honest mind to overlook any circumstance that ought to have weight in forming our judgement of a thing. If it is not, which I believe will not at this time be disputed; and if it is supposed possible for an honest man's thoughts to be led by certain circumstances to run only in the train that has been laid down, I think it cannot be denied, that a truly conscientious person may, in the honest exercise of his private judgement, be exposed to this terrible thunderbolt of ecclesiastic tyranny.

But perhaps it will be alledged, that it is not the gross absurdity of these principles, or the impossibility of any body's being seriously persuaded of them, from whence the obstinacy and perverseness of these people

is inferred; but that it appears from the whole tenor of their behaviour, the unchristian passions they actually give vent to, and the other unwarrantable practices they indulge themselves in. — To which I reply,

1st, It is impossible that any particular instances of this, though ever so numerous, ever so obvious, or well vouched, can vindicate a general rule, that extends not only to the persons known to behave in this manner, but to others, who, for ought that can be pretended to be known, may be moved by nothing but a serious and conscientious scruple; nay, even to many whose conduct being yet in futurity, no guesses can be made by any charitable man, what passions may influence or be intermixed with it. It seems to be none of the fairest or candidest ways of reasoning, to conclude, that because I know some instances of people in a certain way of thinking that do evidently betray their being under the influence of passion and prejudice, therefore all others that fall into the same way of thinking can be acted from nothing else. There is but too good ground to suspect, that many of the first Antinomians that appeared in Germany were led into that pernicious doctrine through a love of licentiousness, and an impatience of the restraints of God's law. But is this a sufficient ground to infer, that therefore no man can fall into that opinion, without being acted by the same motives?

If this sort of reasoning was to pass current, there is not upon the face of the earth a religion that would be out of the reach of its malignant influence. May not one be even a Christian through perverseness and obstinacy? The Apostle Paul not only affirms, that some preached Christ even of envy and strife, supposing to add affliction to his bonds; but he supposes it possible even for one to give his body to be burned from some other motive than a true love to God and man. And must all the preachers of, and all the martyrs for Christianity, be thought to be acted by the same unworthy motives? Is it to be imagined, that among the whole nations that fell in with the Reformation, there were not many individuals that were moved by unwarrantable passions? and that King Henry VIII. of England

is the only instance of a prejudice against the Papal authority arising from private resentment? and perhaps being prosecuted with unjustifiable rancour and ill-nature? But is therefore the whole Protestant religion to be imputed to the same causes? How many Protestant Dissenters in England, especially when under the provocation they formerly met with, may have betrayed such unsubdued passions, as have afforded a handle to their enemies to accuse them of perverseness and obstinacy? But was it therefore right to treat the whole body according to a general rule founded upon that supposition? In like manner, I make no question but there are too many instances of bad men that fall into the fore-mentioned way of thinking through prejudice, and, in the course of their behaviour, discover a bitterness of spirit that is inconsistent with the rules of Christianity; but can any thing else bear us out in loading all that espouse these principles with the same malignity of spirit, but the impossibility of being led into them any other way?

But, 2dly, If there is sufficient evidence of any one who professes Christianity being guilty of malice, revenge, or such other unchristian dispositions, let them be excluded from partaking of the sacraments with all my heart. No body can more heartily wish to see our discipline levelled directly against such indisputable immoralities, and what no body can pretend to reconcile with a sincere profession of the Christian religion. But at the same time let them be fairly distinguished from that which is; and let not the church-artillery be so wrong pointed, as to hit only a tender conscience, while the most feared and brawny ones are allowed to play at the very mouth of the cannon. If there are some that cannot walk the streets without abusing their neighbours, must the magistrate, instead of punishing them for abusing their neighbours, draw the sword against every body who presumes to walk upon the streets? Let what is worthy of punishment be punished, and what is worthy of censure be censured, without confounding therewith what is really of a quite different nature: whereas, in the way that these severe proceedings are laid, it is not revenge, or any indisputed immo-

ality, that is censured, but the mere scruple of conscience, or call it the pretended scruple: it is this altogether upon which the censure is inflicted.

3dly, Granting that in fact, and in the sight of God, who sees the hearts of men, this pretended scruple did really arise in every instance from unjustifiable prejudices, and unchristian passions, and though the persons who make a pretence of it, may, upon that account, be justly liable to the divine displeasure, and expose themselves to the righteous judgement of that God who seeth not as man seeth; yet all this can signify nothing to men, who are necessarily limited in all their judgements to outward appearances; nor can it be a sufficient ground, or a proper foundation, for the sentence of any human judicature, which must always proceed *secundum allegata et probata*. It may be alledged, that it is impossible to *prove*, that one who pretends a scruple about applying to the minister that has been ordained in the parish where he dwells has really no such scruple, or none but what arises from his own perverseness and obstinacy; This no doubt is the case; the thing may be true; nay, the man may, upon some occasions, betray very unwarrantable passions, which, if he was censured for, I should never reclaim; But as for his refusal of applying to the minister in any of his spiritual concerns, which is the single and precise ground of his being so severely censured, he is supposed himself to ascribe this, not to those unwarrantable passions, but to a conviction he has of the sinfulness thereof. The inward motives by which he has been led into such conviction, and the influence of his passions in forming his judgement, are perfectly obvious indeed to the searcher of hearts; but are so far from being the objects of our view, or that of any other witnesses liable to our examination, that it is not always distinctly known to the man himself. How then can such a scruple be imputed to perverseness and obstinacy, so as to found a judicial sentence, if recourse is not had to the impossibility of its arising from any thing else?

And here let me ask these Reverend animadvertors upon scrupulous consciences, Whether they would undertake to justify the civil magistrate in pretending to

enforce their rigorous discipline, by harassing the same people, or punishing the same irregularities, with civil penalties likewise? If I am not much mistaken, most of the espousers of these high measures would take it as a piece of injustice to be suspected of persecuting principles, or of any inclination to have punishment inflicted on the erroneous in their persons or estates. But upon what account is it that they do not think error a punishable crime, especially when, as in the present case, it disturbs the peace of human society? I hope they do not carry the matter so far as M. Bayle does in his Philosophical Commentary, as if error was an absolutely innocent thing, and men were not at all culpable in the wrong judgements which it must be owned they are often led into by unwarrantable passions and prejudices. If they did, it would be still more for my purpose. But for my own part, I am so heartily a friend to the cause undertaken in that treatise, by one reputed so able an advocate for it, that I am extremely concerned to see it put upon so untenible a footing, and to see things advanced, which, if they were solid, would be the best vindication of the very practice he intended to oppose, and must at least tend to convince the world, that persecution itself is a very innocent thing. For this reason, I shall only suppose our brethren maintaining, what I wish that gentleman had said, viz. that all the difference between those errors which are punishable, and those which are otherwise, consists in things which are truly and distinctly seen and known by God, but are imperceptible to men; and that we cannot suppose any men commissioned by God to judge one another in matters where he has afforded them so little light whereby to discern what is punishable and what is not so. Now, if this be good reasoning when applied to a secular court, is it not equally so with relation to an ecclesiastical one? Do the judges of the one pretend to penetrate any farther into a human heart than those of the other? or that a clergyman can trace the influence on the operation of our minds far beyond the ken of a layman? Is it not for this very reason that the Apostle Paul expressly prohibits, not only any censure to be inflicted, but even any uncharitable or censorious

thoughts to be entertained of one another upon account of the different apprehensions we may have of the circumstantial of religion, namely, because we are not the proper judges of one another's behaviour in these cases; but that God has reserved the judgement of this allenarly to himself alone? Rom. xiv. 3. 4. 5. 6. 10. I cannot better conclude this whole argument than in the words of the apostle, vers. 13. of that same chapter, "Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling-block, or an occasion to fall in his brother's way."

II. This is a most important and material alteration of the terms of Christian communion from what they were left in the gospel, and the establishing of a new and a very different one from any that Christ has established; so as that the seals of the covenant are hereby denied to those to whom Christ does not refuse the benefits of it, and the doors of the church are shut against them who will be admitted into the gates of heaven. Really I would fain know whether even those who have the most undoubted conviction of these peoples being in the wrong, and that in every case that may occur, will pretend to say, that their error is a damnable one, and utterly inconsistent with salvation. Pray what is it that should make it so? Is it a fundamental article of Christianity, that the people are not to exercise their own judgement in the choice of their pastor, but in all cases to be absolutely determined in that matter by the judgement of their ecclesiastical superiors? Be it ever so true, are the essentials of the Christian religion so nearly concerned in it, or so deeply affected thereby, that there is no consenting to the Christian covenant without the belief of it? If people know and believe the doctrine of the gospel concerning our salvation by Jesus Christ, may they not be true Christians, though they are in some mistake about a very disputable point of church-government? Even with respect to church-government, they have no difference with their superiors about the form of it. They do not deny that submission is due to their pastor; but only, conscious as they are that such a particular person had never their consent, they do not look upon him in that light. And

if this be a mistake, is it no less than a damnable one? I must own, how high soever some of us are apt to carry their own power, I have not the least suspicion of their dealing about damnation, and limiting the mercy of God, at this furious rate.

Is it, then, their presuming to think that a decree of church-power may be a sinful one, or their refusal of active obedience to that which they think so, is this inconsistent with a state of grace? If so, what shall become of all the Protestant churches? what, particularly, of the Westminster Assembly? and of those Reverend Gentlemen themselves, who have subscribed it as the confession of their own faith, that "all synods or councils, since the apostles time, whether general or particular, may err, and many have erred; therefore they are not to be made the rule of faith or practice, but to be used as an help in both." I dare be confident, then, that I shall have leave from the very highest flyers that we have in these matters, to take it for granted, that how real soever the mistake of these people may be, yet it is at least consistent with their being true Christians, with their being in the favour of God, and intitled to everlasting happiness.

And dare any man, or any body of men, whatever their office or station in the church may be, take it upon them to make a general rule, whereby the communion of Christians is withheld from such as are in communion with Jesus Christ? Shall the seals of the covenant be denied by the servants to them that are brought within the bond of it by the master? Are we to throw without the pale of the visible and militant church those whom Christ has loved to such a degree, as to give himself to purchase a place for them even in the triumphant one? Will any man, or body of men, by a standing law, presume to debar perpetually them for whom the body of Christ was broken, and his blood shed, from partaking of the symbols of that very body and blood? or from the laver of regeneration, the children of those concerning whom the Holy Ghost has said, The promise is unto you, and to your children? and of whole children Christ has said, Suffer them to come unto me; for of such is the kingdom of heaven?

The peoples partaking of the sacraments may be considered both as their duty and as their privilege. If we consider it in the first view, what sense can there be in prohibiting or hindering their obedience to the plain and express laws of Christ, which they are convinced of their obligation to, for no other reason but because they have refused obedience to a command of men, of their obligation to which they are not convinced? Must the laws of Christ be postponed to our own? and the worship, and gratitude, and obedience, that are due to him, must they be forced to wait till once all the authority that his servants are pleased to assume be fully established, and that regard be first paid which they may imagine is due to their own injunctions? But it is not only the duty, it is likewise the great privilege, of every Christian to be admitted to a participation of these holy ordinances. As they are in themselves admirably adapted for quickening the graces, enlivening the affections, and strengthening the consolations of good men, so they are the instituted means whereby the promised assistance of the Holy Spirit may justly be expected to be communicated to us. And is it to be supposed, that even the real weakness of a true Christian is a sufficient reason for driving him from the use of those means that are so profitable, and so necessary to his edification and growth in grace? that are so highly proper for one that is really weak in the faith, that his faith may be thereby enlarged and strengthened, whom therefore we are required to receive, but not to doubtful disputations?

And indeed, abstracting from the reason of the thing, as those ordinances are of positive institution, the great iniquity of debarring true Christians from the participation of them, consists in the presumption there is in altering to them the terms of admission that Christ has fixed. Has not Christ expressly commanded to baptise all nations that are discipled? And does not the Apostle Paul allow all Christians who are members of that one body, to be all partakers of that one bread? If Christ be the alone King and Lawgiver of his church, it must unavoidably follow, that no member of the Christian society can, agreeably to his will, be cut off from the privileges thereof, except for the sole cause of trans-

gressing his laws. And to divest of these privileges any true disciple of his, whom he is pleased to bestow his favour upon, for the transgression of mere church-laws, can be no less than a treasonable usurpation of the incommunicable right of the Lord Jesus Christ to be the only King of his own church. The scripture speaks with a good deal of severity against removing the landmarks of men; what then shall we say of changing those which the supreme lawgiver has established?

I have always thought, that whatever may be necessary to our acceptance with God, the single condition that was requisite in order to admission by men, was a visible and a credible profession of Christianity. This, I acknowledge, lays the door of these ordinances open to a great many whom God knows to be but false and hollow professors; and there is no help for it, as long as the keys are in the hands of fallible man, who cannot see beyond the outward appearance. Indeed there may be such a profession as is not sufficient even before men. As a parrot's repeating an article of the creed cannot be called a profession of the Christian faith; so, unless a man appears to have some competent understanding of the religion he professes to believe, he cannot, even by men, be accounted a believer of it. In like manner, if a subject, after having taken the oaths to his prince, should trample his picture under foot, curse him to his face, or rise in open rebellion against him, this would no doubt blast the credit of any profession he had made of his loyalty. So whatever profession one may have of being a Christian, if he be either so grossly ignorant, as to have no tolerable apprehension of that religion he would be thought to have embraced, or so scandalous in his life, as to continue impenitent under the open breach of the known laws of Christ, either of these, to be sure, must sink the credit of any profession to such a degree, as that in these cases it must needs go for nothing. But I would fain know by what warrant any ministerial officers in the church of Christ can exclude from a participation of his ordinances his professed disciples, upon the account of any thing that is consistent with the credibility of that profession. I shall freely grant, that the

rulers of the church not only may, but must, pass a judgement upon any claim that is made to church-privileges: but if the authority of Christ, who purchased these privileges, and has doubtless the best right to direct the disposal of them, has tied them down to the condition of a credible profession of his religion, how can they vindicate the exclusion of professors upon a ground which they themselves will not pretend to say renders that profession incredible? Let them judge, by all means, what is or is not a contradiction to the profession that is made by those who apply for admission; but can they consistently refuse admission, while at the same time they allow that their refusal is founded upon what is really no contradiction to that profession? and if the objection be founded upon what is a matter of conscience on the one side, and what no divine revelation is so much as pretended to be concerned in on the other side, but mere church-authority, of what enormous a size must that church-power be grown to, that sincere Christians must either resolve to sink under the load, and suffer their consciences to be entirely crushed with the weight of it, or renounce the peculiar privileges of Christianity?

“ Most certainly (says a late writer *) there is a dignity and a glory in every rational creature and immortal soul, which must recommend it to the wise and the good, though it may be destitute of the ornaments of education, or splendid circumstances of life. Let us think of it in its lowest ebb of fortune, or even of character, as still the offspring and image of the great Father of spirits, and as the purchase of redeeming love; let us consider what an influence its temper and conduct may have at least on the happiness of some little circle of human creatures, with whom Providence has linked it in kindred, in friendship, or in interest; and especially let us consider what it may become in the gradual brightenings and improvements of the eternal state; let us seriously dwell on such reflections as these, too obvious to be overlooked, yet too important to be forgot, and we shall

* Observations upon church-affairs, printed anno 1734.

“ find a thousand arguments concurring to inspire mi-
 “ nisters of the gospel with such a regard for the
 “ people, as will, in my apprehension of things, neces-
 “ sarily lead them to say, that there cannot be a more
 “ notorious lording it over them, or a more flagrant
 “ exercising the lordship and dominion of the Gen-
 “ tiles, than by spiritual penalties, (temporal ones not
 “ being in your power), to stake them down, whether
 “ willing or unwilling, under the rule and government
 “ of a particular minister; obliging them, poor help-
 “ less people, to acquiesce in him, and commit them-
 “ selves to his power, whether they apprehend him fit
 “ for the trust or not. And can you, Sir, think that
 “ this is no wise contrary to the mind of Christ? I
 “ hope you will not say so; and yet, unreasonable, un-
 “ christian as it is, it is of late become too customary
 “ in the church, the main body of some Christian con-
 “ gregations being cut off from church-privileges, un-
 “ less they will receive them from the hands of one
 “ that is obtruded upon them, or procure from him a
 “ liberty to repair to others for them. If it be an ad-
 “ vantage for children to be baptised, and if, by the
 “ law of Christ, they are intitled to this privilege, is it
 “ just, or is it Christian, to make their enjoyment
 “ of it to depend upon the judgement of the parents
 “ agreeing with the judgement of a particular mini-
 “ ster, or upon their compliance or non-compliance
 “ with mere church canons and appointments? A-
 “ gain, whose is the table at the holy communion? Is
 “ it the Lord’s table? or is it the table of a party of
 “ men? If it be the Lord’s, then certainly it ought
 “ to be free to his guests, i. e. to such as make a visible
 “ and credible profession of Christianity; and such
 “ ought not to be debarred for their non-compliance
 “ with the ordinances and appointments of men. You
 “ will say, these things are necessary for maintaining good
 “ order and government. Must then the most sacred
 “ institutions of Christ be prostituted to the base and ig-
 “ noble service of being employed as tools to support
 “ the power and authority of church-men? Shameful
 “ prostitution! O, my soul! enter not thou into their
 “ secrets.”

This mighty concern of the church-rulers for their own authority, and such grievous oppression of real but scrupulous Christians in support of the credit of their own decrees, must, in my apprehension, appear still more out of character, (the character I mean that should belong to clergymen), if it is done at a time when the undisputed laws of Christ are in a great measure left to shift for themselves, at least when no such concern, no such zeal, is discovered for procuring the regard that is due to them, no such resentment is shewn at the open breach of them, and when any attempt towards discountenancing such things, or extending the concern of the church-judicatories that way, is perpetually found to be borne down by a dead weight from the same quarter. Are there none within the bounds of this church, nay, are there few, that instead of being repulsed when they have an earnest desire to partake of the seals of the covenant of grace, give a repulse to every exhortation, and every opportunity of renewing and sealing their baptismal covenant? who live in the habitual contempt of that express command of Jesus Christ himself, This do in remembrance of me? who cannot so much as bear the place where others are employed in obedience to it, but fly from the town to the country, and from the country to the town, to avoid so odious a business? Are there none that make a pretty open profession of infidelity, and stick not to sneer at the authority of Christ altogether; nay, that seem to have renounced even natural religion itself, and in a great measure abandoned all sort of worship of a supreme being, whether public or private? Are there no scandalous and habitual drunkards, no cursing and swearing upon our streets, or open profanation of the Lord's day? Would to God that these, and many other such questions, were capable of an answer that would not be to the purpose of the present argument. But is the access of these sorts of professing Christians to sealing ordinances as straitly barred? Christians they do profess to be in some respect. They are baptised themselves, and they demand baptism for their children. And pray how often is it refused? Are not those who will not so much as be witnesses to the celebration of the Lord's supper

freely admitted to present their children in baptism, while a scrupulous and conscientious Christian is denied the same privilege?

The assembly 1647, whose authority is alledged in behalf of severity against Dissenters, took a quite different course. If we compare their conduct in relation to the different characters that have been mentioned, the contrast between it and the present measures cannot fail, I should think, to have some effect. At the same time that they proceed with caution against them that withdraw from the public worship in their own congregation, and the utmost they venture to say is only, in the general, that they be censured, or that the matter be brought to the presbytery; they, on the other hand, keep no measures with the obstinate neglecters of family-worship, but expressly appoint them to be debarred from the Lord's supper. It is always observed to be otherwise when men are at the helm who are steering with a view to some present and temporal interest or advantage of their own. In that case, the sacredest laws of Christianity, or even of nature, may be suffered to be thrown overboard, if their own power and authority, and their own peculiar projects, can but weather the storm. Rapin, in the preface to the eleventh volume of his History of England, observes of the times under the reign of King Charles II. that then "it was more dangerous to be a Presbyterian than an Atheist." Much to the same purpose is the character given of the bishops under his royal father by the celebrated Lord Falkland, in a speech which he made upon that subject in parliament, as it is related in that same volume: "We shall find them," says he, "to have tithed mint and annise, and have left undone the weightier matters of the law; to have been less eager upon those who damn our church, than upon those who upon weak conscience, and perhaps as weak reasons, only abstained from it. Nay, it hath been more dangerous for men to go to some neighbour's parish when they had no sermon in their own, than to be obstinate and perpetual recusants; while masses have been said in security, a conventicle hath been a crime; and what is yet more, the conforming to ceremonies hath been

“ more exacted than the conforming to Christianity ;
“ and whilst men for scruples have been undone, for at-
“ tempts upon sodomy they have only been admonish-
“ ed.” I hope things shall not soon at least come to
that pass among us. But I am sorry to observe the
smallest beginnings of any thing of that nature, and that
there should be so much resemblance between us and
them as there is.

III. This treatment of the people does absolutely an-
nihilate the most plausible account of or excuse for the
conduct of the authors of it, in the active hand they
have had in the violent settlements which give occasion
for this question. As there are some of these Reverend
Gentlemen who think fit to make use of the principles
of liberty upon other occasions, they have sometimes at-
tempted to reconcile therewith their cramming a mini-
ster down the throats of a reluctant people. They
frankly own, that all religion must be voluntary, and
do not pretend to constitute a spiritual relation between
a minister and any man without his own consent ; but
at the same time they observe, that the temporal encou-
ragement in the established church is at the disposal of
the civil government ; and if there are any persons what-
ever within the district to which such an encouragement
is allotted, that are willing to take the benefit of what
the laws of their country have provided, and are con-
tent with that minister to whom the legal maintenance is
limited by the same laws, they alledge it would be doing
them a piece of injustice to deprive them of that advan-
tage, because a majority happens to be otherwise mind-
ed. I shall not say how far the seeming consent upon
which this reasoning is founded may in some cases be
extorted, or how little the consenters, if left to them-
selves, would in some cases complain of the injustice al-
ledged to be done to them. Possibly there are scarce
any of the settlements that have occasioned the present
clamour, where there have not been two or three at
least whose appearance may give some colour to such an
argument. But be they many or few, they who make
use of this argument, assign the minister that is settled
upon the legal establishment alienarly to them, and do
not at all pretend to force them who are unwilling to

submit to his ministry, but leave them entirely at liberty to provide themselves otherwise.

This must be allowed to be the most specious argument for ordaining one a minister where the bulk of the congregation are loudly reclaiming against it, and is indeed the only footing it can be put upon that is at all consistent with any shadow of liberty among private Christians. It is not my business at this time to show why it does not satisfy me; nor is it necessary upon this occasion, as it is an argument that can be made no use of by those whom I have now to do with; and therefore all that I have now to observe is, that though it is the only plausible reasoning that I have met with on that side of the question, they who would force the most unwilling by the strictest severities to a submission, do thereby deprive themselves of the benefit thereof. This I presume is so abundantly obvious as to need no illustration.

IV. What has been just now said, leads me to another argument against this severity, namely, that it enthrals us under a far heavier and more galling yoke of patronage than that which our enemies themselves wreathed about our necks. How fond soever some among us seem now to be of patronages, yet our general assemblies have frequently informed our sovereigns, that the restoring of them was the work of our enemies, and that in resentment of our zealous attachment to the Protestant line of our royal family, and have often complained of them as a grievous burden upon this church, as the assembly 1712, act 10; 1715, act 9; and the assemblies 1735 and 1736. But with what face can we complain of the injuries done us by our bitterest foes, when our assemblies themselves, as if looking upon the resentment of our enemies to be but blunt, and able only to cut half through the skin, have put a keener edge upon it, and showed how it may touch the quick? In truth, what comparison is there between all the hardship the people suffer from the civil effects, I may call them only, of the act of parliament restoring patronages, and this spiritual tyranny over and bondage of their consciences? If there can be supposed to be any thing at all in the reasoning above mentioned under the former argument,

the one is but trivial, negative, and tolerable; the other positive, real, and intolerable. The utmost length that even our enemies ventured to go in vexing us, was only to deprive the people of a minister whom they liked, or rather of the legal maintenance for his support; whereas their pretended friends would tie them with the most fretful and galling fetters, the most rigorous spiritual penalties, to one they do not like, but have violentest prejudice against. One would be disobliged perhaps at another that should hinder him from possessing a house that he thought extremely agreeable, and preferred to most others, or rather that, without any just provocation, should withdraw his usual bounty of paying the rent of it for him, how would he then take it, to be staked down to a mire, or forcibly confined to a loathsome prison? If a man had fixed his affections upon a woman whom he had made choice of for a wife, he would not take it quite well, to be sure, if her father absolutely refused to give him a farthing of dower with her; but how much more would he be provoked, if his own father should disinherit and disown him for not marrying one that was his utter aversion? In short, the Tory parliament has only provided presentees with a stipend; and the Whig assembly would force a spiritual relation to them. The one has only presumed to dispose of tithes, manse, and glebe, their power over which no body disputes; while the other would offer violence to that which is so far out of their reach as the hearts of men.

It is easy to give many instances, was it not for being tedious, wherein the sad effects of violent settlements are by such measures not only aggravated, but multiplied; and particularly, not to insist on several other circumstances that will readily occur to any who are at the pains to turn over the matter in their own thoughts,

V. Such violent methods are so far from being the likeliest means of reconciling the people to the minister that has been planted among them, that, on the contrary, it is the surest and certainest course that can be taken to defeat its own design, and to increase and render more inveterate and invincible the prejudices that have been conceived against the incumbent. This appears to

me so extremely obvious and unquestionable, both from the nature of the thing, and from the constant and uniform experience of all ages in every case of the same nature, as well as in this particular one, that it is surprising how it can escape the observation of any body.

Though there never had been a single example to convince us of this, I should imagine the very nature of the thing would glare in every man's eyes. For what is it that is wanted? Is it not the esteem, the inclinations, and the affection of the people? Now this may be drawn, but it can never be driven. If their bodies even could be driven within the walls of the church, what would that signify? It is not their bodies, but their souls, that are the objects of the church's concern. But how extremely absurd must it be to exert a power that affects neither the one nor the other, that if it have any effect must drive even their bodies from the church, instead of reconciling their minds to it? Kindness and good usage, forgiveness of injuries, and a concern for their most important interests, oft times has conquered inveterate prejudices, and may still produce the same effect; but to attempt the extorting of this by violence, is as if one should go about to drain an inundation by building up a mighty dam against it, instead of opening canals in the properest places. Nothing is so likely to irritate people's minds, and to increase, or even excite an aversion at any one, as his being the instrument, or even the occasion, of their being harassed and ill used, or treated in a way that appears ill usage to them; so that if before such ill usage, they had no very good liking to him, their minds may well be supposed to be doubly rankled against him after it: and as the natural compassion of neighbours and friends is apt to be engaged on the side of sufferers, such usage, instead of lessening, must be daily adding to the number of Dissenters.

And indeed this has so often happened in experience, that whoever has read any thing of church-history must have observed two things that appear at first view extremely inconsistent, yet most uniformly and constantly succeeding one another, namely, that, on the one hand, violence offered to conscience scarcely ever fails to recoil upon the authors of it, and to promote the cause

it was intended to destroy; and yet, on the other hand, that men of worldly views, whenever they have power in their hands, as if they had not eyes to perceive what is so obvious, never fail to try the so-often unsuccessful experiment again. The persecution of the secular arm was so soon observed to be advantageous to the oppressed cause, that it came to be a common saying among the primitive Christians, That the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church. And yet the Heathen priests and emperors, insensible to a truth that was grown palpable, never gave over trying the same method for suppression of the true religion, till they had persecuted almost the whole world into Christianity. But did this teach the Christians to make a better use of the spiritual power that was in the hands of the church-rulers? Read but the history of their councils and their contests, and you will find the contrary almost in every page. Their discipline, when it had immorality for its object, had indeed a most admirable and fine effect. But they would apply church-censures for supporting their own authority, as well as that of their master. And yet, if they had not shut their eyes, they might have observed, in every instance where it was prostituted to such ignoble purposes, that the Christian discipline, faithful to its original intention, did always scorn to serve the interests, or to promote the views, of any other than him from whom it derived its authority. No sooner did it touch a conscience, but it was ready to turn about and worry them that had set it on. The Novatians, the Meletians, the Audians, and others of the like sort, whom the impatient and domineering bishops of those times used to curse in their synods, and to make heretical sects of, seem only to have been honest and more zealous than others; and if they had been softly used, would not have made the half of the noise they did. But what was the effect of the rigorous measures that were taken to subdue them? Did they not always drive them farther and farther, put strength in their hands, and enable them to draw multitudes after them, form schisms, and set up altar against altar?

I think it is Voltaire, in his Letters concerning the English nation, when speaking of the Dissenters, and

comparing their former to their present state, has an observation which possibly he may carry too far, namely, That it is persecution alone that can make Dissenters formidable; and that, if they be kindly used, all Dissenters will in time sink into the establishment. But though this will not be found perhaps to hold universally, and without exception, yet it is certain, that England and Scotland too has afforded most remarkable proofs of what I am now saying. In King Charles I.'s time, all Britain was made zealously Presbyterian, by the mere violence that was used to force the consciences of all men into a submission to Episcopal government and ceremonies. A writer of the last century, who was a living witness of what had happened, observes, that "the
 " prelates, who were rooted fast enough in the laws of
 " the land before, would make a canon-oath, to settle
 " themselves in the consciences of men too; that they,
 " being established both by law and conscience, might
 " be like Mount Sion, which cannot be removed, but
 " standeth fast for ever: yet that very canon-oath hath
 " been turned upon themselves, and hath not only
 " blasted their pomp, but battered down their power,
 " and hath produced a sacred covenant-oath, by which
 " both houses of parliament, and the people of these
 " three kingdoms, are engaged for their extirpa-
 " tion *."

But what need we have recourse to other times and places, which might furnish us with abundant examples of this, when there are so many before our eyes in the very affair now in question? Let any one but observe what effect high measures have among our own people, and what sort of treatment usually makes them fall from opposition, or hardens them in it. If, in any instance, a minister that was settled against their inclination, has come to be useful and successful among them, has it not been by discreet and affectionate usage of them? and, on the contrary, when recourse is had to rigorous and authoritative ways, has it not always driven them from bad to worse? And pray how can it be otherwise? We have no other hold of them but by their hearts and

* Caryl on Job, v. 13.

consciences : if we let that go, and try to keep them by any other means, we may as well expect to hinder the wind from blowing by scolding and threatening it.

When I compare these two standing and invariable facts together, viz. the perpetual unsuccessfulness of rigid measures upon such occasions, and yet the constant and incurable propension that is in a certain sort of men to fly to them, I cannot account for the last, without reflecting upon a pretty observation of Dr Tillotson's, in that admirable discourse on John, i. 47. which was the last, and one of the best, ever he preached. After having shewn, with a most beautiful and irresistible force of reasoning, and in a most inimitable style, the incomparable advantage of plain honesty and sincerity even in our worldly business, and how extremely mistaken and short-sighted that policy is which consists in the little tricks, and crafty subtilties, that are often looked upon as signs of great depth and shrewdness, but really are most egregious folly, and seldom fail to recoil, and hurt the man that uses them, he adds, " I have often
" thought, that God hath, in great wisdom, hid from
" men of false and dishonest minds the wonderful ad-
" vantages of truth and integrity to the prosperity even
" of our worldly affairs. — Were but this sort of men
" wise and clear-sighted enough to discern this, they
" would be honest out of very knavery, not out of any
" love to honesty or virtue, but with a crafty design to
" promote and advance more effectually their own in-
" terests ; and therefore the justice of the divine pro-
" vidence hath hid this truest point of wisdom from
" their eyes, that bad men might not be upon equal
" terms with the just and upright, and serve their own
" wicked designs by honest and lawful means."

VI. This severity lays the people who are subject to it under a necessity to separate from the communion of this church, and to join with the Seceders ; furnishing them with an unanswerable argument for, and depriving us of any good argument against it, in so far at least as their separation from our communion is concerned. While they cannot pretend that there are any sinful terms of communion required of them, it will be impossible for them to vindicate a practice so contrary

to what must be the very design of any true religion at all, i. e. the promoting of peace and union, love and harmony, among men; a practice so opposite to the spirit of Christianity, so ruinous and destructive to the body of Jesus Christ, and so inconsistent with the directions and earnest exhortations of Christ and his apostles in the scripture; for it is certain, that we are required, not only to keep in union and communion with the perfect, glorious, and triumphant church, which is, and can only be above; but with the sinful, imperfect, and militant church, as all must be that are below. But as soon as any thing is required of us as a necessary condition of communion, that cannot be complied with without violating the dictates of our own consciences, I defy all the world to vindicate the keeping of communion with any church whatsoever upon such terms. I can keep communion with a very corrupt church, that had wronged me to the value of a thousand pounds; but I would renounce communion with the purest and perfectest church upon earth, that would not receive me, unless I would consent to wrong my neighbour, if it were but to the value of the thousandth part of one pound. So that, in truth, any body whom we thus drive out of our communion, is not guilty of separating from us, but we of separating from him: for on that side the schism lies where the scriptural terms of communion are first broken. This not only furnishes them with a good pretext, and even an unanswerable argument, for separating from us, but really lays them under an indispensable necessity of doing it.

I know there are some Reverend promoters of the high measures, that will readily admit both this and the former consequence; but at the same time make light thereof, as an argument against any thing that produces such effects. "Let them go, (say they), we are better without them than with them. The Secession is a sort of evacuation of bad humours, that is necessary to the health of the rest of the body, and has actually contributed to make us easier than otherwise we would have been; and the Seceders are heartily welcome to such troublesome members of society." This sort of

reasoning, I must own, appears to me in such a light, that I could not allow myself to impute it to any who bears the character of a minister of the gospel, if, besides the clear connection between these consequences and the measures they think fit to pursue, I did not certainly know that some of them do indulge themselves in this way of defending them; and therefore I would beg leave to ask them the following questions.

I. Will they really profess to have nothing else, or nothing more in view, in their ecclesiastical government, than their own ease and quiet? And will they pretend to lay this down for a rule, That whatever measures have the likeliest tendency to preserve them from future trouble and contradiction, are therefore to be preferred? What was it that first introduced the Popish doctrine of infallibility, and carried it at last to such an amazing height, that there was actually an implicit faith yielded, and a blind obedience given, to the most extravagant ravings of tyranny and superstition? what else occasioned all this but the same impatience of contradiction? If ignorance be not the mother of devotion, it is at least the nurse of implicit faith, and blind obedience, and saves a despotic priest the trouble of arguing with a parishioner, who dares venture to differ in any of his sentiments from him. But is it therefore a right thing, and are measures to be pursued, for promoting what may contribute so much to the peace and quiet of the church? The establishment of an inquisition, of a bastile, or of mutes and bowstrings, would possibly purge this happy (because free, and therefore by some called mutinous and turbulent) people of Great Britain of those unruly spirits that have the boldness to find fault with any thing that is done by their superiors. Are these therefore desirable things? Is the end of magistracy the mere enjoyment of power and dominion by the rulers? and is the end of the ministerial office the ease and quiet, the uncontrouled authority, of the pastors, and the undisputed submission of the people? Is not some regard, nay the chief regard, due to their edification? And are not those the best measures that have the directest tendency to promote the practice of true religion amongst them?

2. Do they imagine, that the practice of true religion is best promoted among the people, by separating from this church, and joining with the Seceders? Is the spirit that we commonly see diffused among the people of that denomination the spirit of Christianity? Do they not actually see the falling in with the Seceders tending to four peoples tempers, and to inspire them with prejudices, with rancour, and bitterness, against their neighbours? Are not the fruits of the Spirit love and charity, meekness and humility? and can there be any true Christianity, or indeed any true religion at all, when these are not the fruits that are cultivated? But has the Secession been so long among us without their perceiving the pride, the self-conceit, and contempt of others, the hatred, variance, emulations, strife, &c. that it has produced, and which it is really calculated to promote? I say, which it is really calculated to promote: For this Secession being originally occasioned, not by any terms of communion being insisted on that bore the least hard upon any man's conscience, but by mere discontentment and impatience of contradiction, those who have involved themselves in it have really no choice of the means whereby it must be continued and supported. If their people are not taught to look upon the established church as corrupted and infectious to a very great degree, they will naturally fall back into a communion which costs them nothing for the maintenance of a minister, and where the same doctrine, worship, discipline, and government, obtains, for which they pretend a more than ordinary zeal, as long as they find nothing required of them that is at all gravelling to their consciences. And therefore the leaders of the Seceders have really brought themselves under a sort of necessity to lay hold upon every handle that offers to blacken their brethren as much as ever they can, and are unawares led to cultivate in the minds of their people the seeds of uncharitableness, animosity, and bitterness, against their neighbours. This they have not so much as in their choice to avoid. Let a man be ever so good natured and sweet blooded, he must either let the Secession sink, or keep its head above water by these

means. Accordingly, is it not a notorious fact, that even at the celebration of that holy sacrament, which was intended by our Saviour as one of the most powerful means for promoting love and charity, and the communion of saints, the people among them are commonly entertained with discourses that have the directest tendency to inflame their minds with prejudices against their Christian brethren of another denomination, and to drive them to a greater distance from them? It is this chiefly that excites my concern, to see our people, whose edification the clergy, I think, ought to be interested in, driven into that communion. And if I thought that those who have an active hand in driving them to it had more favourable impressions than I have of the effects it is apt to have upon their spirit and temper, I own, I would look upon it as a less cruel and mischievous office.

But, 3. Is it nothing to see that office which they have solemnly, and in the name of God, consecrated one of their friends to, turned into a mere sinecure? Can the whole end they had in view be supposed to be obtained when once a friend is provided with a temporal livelihood only? Is it not one of the grossest and most sacreligious alienations of the church's revenue, to pursue measures that have a tendency to convert into an annuity for a useless person that stipend which is provided for the maintenance of a pastor for the people in a certain district? to turn the churches, which are built and repaired at the expence of the parish for accommodating the people in their assemblies for public worship, into a sort of empty theatres, where little better than a farce must be acted, for a pretence to this same annuity? It is certain, that whole parishes, to a trifle, have in fact at least deserted him they call the intruder, if they have not all joined the Seceders: and though this was but an apprehended consequence, it is the same thing as to the present argument, seeing this consequence, if it should happen, is denied to be of any weight against the measures that have a tendency to produce it.

It must be owned, that the Secession, as it was originally owing to these high measures, so it derives all its strength and support from the promoters of them, not

only as they disoblige the people by the violent settlements which they still continue to make over their bellies, but particularly as they drive them out of our communion by the severity of their discipline, and the oppressive tyranny of their government. And I will add a third way whereby the Seceſſion is much obliged to them, whatever opposition there may seem to be between them at first view, namely, the countenance they give to, if not their actually adopting of the most essential and characteristical principle of the Seceders, which is, That communion is not to be kept with any who differ from us about the very circumstantial of religion. And here let me apply to them the words of a moderate divine, concerning the similitude between the principles espoused by the high church of England, and those of the church of Rome: "The essence, therefore, of Popery, (says he), does not properly stand in the many errors of that party, nay, nor in the gross idolatry itself, which are all but the natural effects or consequences of ignorance and blind devotion; but the very soul and spirit of it consists in a pretended infallible jurisdiction over the reason and consciences of men, and is exerted and discovered by the arbitrary, tyrannical, and unchristian methods of force and cruelty."

S E R M O N I.

I COR. xiii. 12.

For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

IF it be at all excuseable to indulge our curiosity in matters of religion, it must certainly be so when the inquiry is concerning our future happiness. This is none of those dry speculations that involve us in endless perplexities, and lead us into inextricable labyrinths. It sets before our eyes the most entertaining views, and opens to the mind a most unbounded and glorious prospect. But I would not insist upon the pleasure that attends it, if it were not so useful and necessary for a Christian to have his thoughts much upon that subject. It is this that animates us with life and vigour in the practice of our duty, and inspires the fainting Christian with renewed strength and activity. As the sight of a noble prize at the end of a race invigorates a runner with new spirits, and makes him strain with redoubled efforts; so the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus makes us forget those things that are behind, and reach forth to those things that are before, pressing towards the noble mark. When we meditate on the reward of our labours, it keeps up our spirits, and makes all the little rubs and difficulties in our way almost disappear: "For which cause we faint not," says the apostle; "but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at

“ the things which are seen, but at the things which
 “ are not seen : for the things which are seen are tem-
 “ poral ; but the things which are not seen are eter-
 “ nal *.” This is the excuse I have to plead, if I
 may seem to be too particular in the following dis-
 course. General and indeterminate ideas have but little
 influence upon the practice ; and the closer view we
 take of the pleasures of another life, we will be spurred
 on by a more unwearied diligence, and heated into a
 nobler warmth in pursuing after them. Wherefore I
 have chosen to discourse only of that branch of our fu-
 ture happiness which consists in the advancement of our
 knowledge.

The words I have read are brought in by the apostle
 upon the occasion of his excellent encomium on chari-
 ty, which he prefers to other gifts and graces, that are
 exercised only in this world ; whereas charity shall ac-
 company us into the other, and be exercised in an emi-
 nent manner among all the blissful inhabitants of the
 celestial regions, vers. 8. “ Charity never faileth ; but
 “ whether there be prophecies, they shall fail ; whether
 “ there be tongues, they shall cease ; whether there
 “ be knowledge, it shall vanish away.” But because an
 objection might be raised against the last of these men-
 tioned, viz. knowledge, which, it is plain, shall make
 up a great part of the happiness of the blessed, he ob-
 viates this objection, by telling us, there is so vast differ-
 ence between the knowledge we have in this world and
 that which we shall be possessed of in the next, that in-
 deed they are not the same thing. “ For we know in
 “ part,” says he, “ and we prophesy in part ; but
 “ when that which is perfect is come, then that which
 “ is in part shall be done away.” What goes under the
 name of knowledge here, in comparison of that which
 we shall be masters of in the future state, is like the
 little blunders, and pleasing absurdities, that children
 fall into, when compared with the more solid reasoning
 of their riper years : “ When I was a child, I spake
 “ as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a
 “ child ; but when I became a man, I put away childish

* 2 Cor. iv. 16.

“ things ;” and therefore the apostle tells us, that this imperfect state of our knowledge shall be entirely abolished in the life to come, and give place to knowledge of a quite different and more exalted nature ; which is intimated to us in the latter branch of the comparison : “ But when I became a man, I put away “ childish things.” And in the verse I have read, he settles the difference between the two a little more particularly : “ For now,” says he, “ we see through a “ glass, darkly ; but then face to face ;” which is a very apt and beautiful similitude to illustrate this matter. Although some rays of light may pervade the glass, yet it stops a great many, and in a considerable measure intercepts our vision : so that we have but a dim and confused prospect through so gross a medium ; and are likewise ready to fall into mistakes about the objects that are beyond it, when we have no other mean to correct our judgement. But when the interposing glass is removed, so that we can have an immediate view of things with our naked eyes, or, as the apostle expresseth it, “ face to face ;” then we discern things as they really are, discern them more clearly and distinctly, and form our judgement of them more justly and securely.

This may serve to give us some faint idea of the greatness of our future knowledge, when the vail shall be removed, and the films purged from off our eyes, when we arrive at the land of light, and enter upon the regions of immortality. But what is the precise meaning of these phrases, “ seeing face to face,” and “ knowing even as also we are known,” may perhaps be too bold for us to determine ; and I am so far convinced of the truth of the first clause in the text, that “ we see but darkly, and know but in part,” that I shall not attempt to explain the latter. However, since God has thought fit to reveal unto us some glimpses of our future state, and given us such hints concerning this particular branch of our happiness, as may be improved to good advantage ; and since the mind of man, from two or three general propositions, may deduce a long train of consequences ; finally, since the meditation is so animating and useful, and so big with comfort and

satisfaction; I shall endeavour to improve these hints, and discourse a little to you on this subject, in the following method.

1st, I shall just mention the excellency of knowledge, and how great a happiness it is to be possessed of it in any considerable measure.

2^{dly}, Shall endeavour to shew, that our knowledge must be vastly increased, and extraordinarily improved in heaven, from the circumstances which the saints shall then find themselves in, which we may see will be exactly calculated for advancing in knowledge: and I shall endeavour all along to compare them with our circumstances in this world, to convince us of the assertion in the text, that "here we see darkly, but then shall we know even "as also we are known."

3^{dly}, Shall consider the object of our knowledge; or, what it is we shall then be informed of.

4^{thly}, Name some properties of it. And,

Lastly, Draw some inferences.

I. FIRST of all, then, how noble an acquisition, and how rich a possession knowledge is, need scarcely be insisted on, to those who have tasted any thing of so generous a pleasure; but any argument we can form upon our own experience lies under this disadvantage, that we can only have tasted of the pleasure that attends the small pittance of knowledge attainable in this life. But if it be true, as the apostle tells us, that there is no comparison between this and that we are going to discourse of, the happiness and the excellency of the one must likewise exceed that of the other beyond all bounds of proportion; and yet I have no scruple, even under this disadvantage, to appeal to any who are not sunk in sloth, and over-run with stupidity and brutality, that blunts the edge of our taste, and razes out the relish for any true enjoyments of life, how insinuating, yea, how intoxicating a pleasure it is; and I doubt not they would tell me, that they look upon it as the most exalted and sublimest happiness. It is this that polishes our souls, and refines the human nature. It is this that raises us above the brute and groveling part of the crea-

tion, and adds a dignity to our species. It is knowledge that, next to virtue, truly and essentially raises one man above another. It is this that assimilates us to the superior orders of beings, and makes us resemble the angelic hosts; and, in fine, it is in knowledge, as well as righteousness and holiness, that the image of the great author of our being consists, which was stamped upon us at our first creation; and the higher degrees of this we attain, the nearer approaches we make to him, who is the great pattern of happiness and perfection. This is what truly beautifies a spirit, and gives a lustre to any rational creature; it makes him an ornament to the place where he lives, and the delight of God and man; it lays into the mind a store of its own, so that such a one can afford entertainment for himself; it makes *being* pleasant to us, fills the mind with the most delightful views, and administers a perpetual series of gratification; it diffuses a secret gladness through the heart, and spreads a cheerfulness over all the faculties of the soul. No wonder, then, that men in all ages have been so fond and so proud of this noble acquisition. What pains and labour have not men been at! what time have they consumed! what expence of their fortunes, and wasting of their spirits! what watching nights and wearisome days, has it not cost them in the study of arts and sciences! How proud have they been of any considerable improvements, and how overjoyed with any remarkable advances they have made; insomuch that it is related of an ancient philosopher, that he was so transported at the discovery of a proposition in the mathematics, that he run about like a madman, and cried, as in a rapture, *He had found it, he had found it!* And indeed the names of those who have bestowed their labours in cultivating any valuable branch of knowledge, will be precious, and their memories respectable even to latest posterity; — to them they have afforded more elegant entertainment than can be met with in the prosecution of any sensual pleasure: for as the soul of man is more excellent than his body, so much more excellent is the one pleasure than the other. What is the enjoyment of gold and silver, what is the gratification of our bodily senses, in comparison

to the pleasure a man receives in feasting his soul with its proper food, in satiating its enlarged appetite after knowledge with the discovery of the sublimest truths? This is a pleasure of a more refined and exalted nature; and to want a true relish for it, argues but a corrupt mind, and a depraved taste. The Spirit of God tells us by the wisest of men, that they are only "fools that hate knowledge," Prov. i. 22.; and in the 15th chapter of the same book, and 14th verse, "The heart of him that hath understanding seeketh knowledge; but the mouth of fools feedeth on foolishness." And it is easy to see what a value this wonderful person had for knowledge, by his remarkable choice, recorded in the first chapter of 2 Chronicles, where, instead of riches, and wealth, and honour, he desired of God only wisdom and knowledge; which was so well pleasing to, and so much approved by God, that he gave him both that and these other things he had overlooked for the sake of it. I shall conclude this encomium upon knowledge with that elegant passage of holy writ, which may very fitly be applied here: "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies, and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her," &c. Prov. iii. 13.—19. Thus we see what a valuable and excellent happiness knowledge is.

II. LET us now turn our thoughts towards the other world, and consider what advances in science may be made there, where every thing will be so fitly adapted for this purpose. That our knowledge will be vastly great in the future state, is infallibly certain from the words of our text, where we are told, that we shall see "face to face," and "know even as also we are known." But this will likewise appear, if we consider that all these frailties and imperfections, all the inconveniencies in this world, that are so many bars to our knowledge, and hinders the light from entering into our souls, will then be entirely removed, and we will

be placed in the most advantageous circumstances, and in the properest situation for making the largest advances in knowledge.

1st, All our intellectual faculties will then be renewed and improved. There will not be in heaven an "infant of days;" for "the child shall die an hundred years old *." Our spirits will then be "the spirits of just men made perfect;" and our apostle tells us, "When that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away." Our understandings will be strengthened and enlarged, our apprehensions quick, and our judgements sound. In this imperfect state we have but few clear and distinct ideas; they are often false, frequently confused and obscure: we are dull and slow of apprehension, erroneous in our judgements, and unjust in our conclusions. But then we shall have our capacities so much enlarged, our intellects so active and penetrating, and all the powers of our soul in their most vigorous exercise, without ever flagging, or wearying to be unbent; what progress may we not hope to make, and what noble advances in the celestial sciences? No difficulty will be too hard, and no case too knotty; but every thing will go on smoothly and easily, and all our discoveries will be attended with the firmest satisfaction and the most sensible pleasure: and then our imaginations will be clear and unclouded, our memories tenacious to retain our discoveries, and preserve our knowledge. If in this world we could let nothing slip, but remember every useful thing that we read, hear, or find out by our own proper sagacity, what a prodigious store of ideas would our minds be filled with, and how much more unbounded would the extent of our knowledge be! But in the other world, as our discoveries will be vastly more numerous, we may easily guess how much this will tend to the addition of our happiness. But,

2^{dly}, As this reformation in our souls will be attended with such an addition to our knowledge, so even the new forming of our bodies will likewise contribute its part to this great purpose. In this world our senses are

* Is. lxx. 20.

apt to deceive and impose upon us, to give us false and imperfect ideas of things, which in many instances stand in need to be corrected by reason and judgement: and as they act within a very narrow sphere, a few things that are just about us are all that they can give us sufficient notices of. But we are told, that in heaven our blessed Saviour "shall change our vile bodies, and make " them like unto his own glorious body *," so that we need then be under no apprehensions of being imposed on any more in this respect. The notices of things conveyed by our senses may justly be depended upon, and no doubt the sphere of their action will be vastly widened and enlarged, and they will every way be made more active and penetrating. To instance now only in one will illustrate this matter a little. Sight is one of the senses whereby we take in a great part of our knowledge here. Now, let us only consider what a vast addition would be made to our knowledge, if we could see things as distinctly at the distance of the remotest of the stars as we do at the distance of a few yards. Experience may convince us how much our knowledge of material things has been improved by the invention of artificial glasses, which ingenious men have obliged the world with, whereby the small parts of these objects that are within our reach, as well as things at great distances from us, have been discovered surprisingly beyond what we can discern with our naked eyes. If a man would discover as much with his naked eye as he does when it is assisted with the finest glasses; if he could survey a small portion of matter, and discern the minute parts of it as well without as with a microscope; and if his sight could serve him at as immense distances, and carry him as near to the heavenly bodies as the largest telescope, how vastly would the state of our knowledge be altered? But what bungling assistances, and what clumsy inventions, will microscopes and telescopes appear to be, when the prospect taken in by our naked eye may perhaps be as large as the ken of an angel, when the whole creation will be laid open before us, and all the scenes of it particularly displayed: for our bodies "shall be

* Philip. iii. 21.

“ raised in glory ; — sown in weakness, but raised in power ; — sown natural bodies, but raised spiritual bodies *.” Now, in order to see farther how much this must contribute to the increase of our knowledge, compare these particulars together, and consider that we will take in a greater range of ideas, all of them just, clear, and distinct, and that we will be enabled to retain, compound, and compare them at pleasure with the greatest care and dispatch. At what undescried fields of knowledge may we at length arrive !

3dly, That nothing may stand in our way in the pursuit of truth, all our most unruly passions shall be subdued, and our deep-rooted prejudices eradicated, which are great impediments of our knowledge. Here we are so much blindfolded by passion, and hoodwinked with prejudice, that we are not able of ourselves to grope out our way, but implicitly follow the steps of leaders, as liable to passion and prejudice as ourselves ; and when the blind lead the blind, both must fall into the ditch. In most of our searches after truth, we are apt to degenerate into personal reflections and altercations. There is such a mixture of turbulent passions, that they raise a tumult in the soul, and corrupt the understanding ; or we are so prepossessed with the prejudices of education, party, or interest, and so narrowed and stinted with preconceived opinions, that it is the greatest difficulty to unfetter the mind, and procure that liberty and freedom that is necessary, in order to arrive at true knowledge. But in the other world there will be no contests or divisions, but the perfectest love, unanimity, and concord : all within will be calm and serene, all unruffled and undisturbed ; no factions and contentions without. We will find no bias to any side ; no party, no interest but that of truth : we shall then call no man master but Jesus ; which leads me to another consideration. For,

4thly, Our teachers shall be God himself, and our blessed Saviour Jesus Christ : for “ with thee is the fountain of light,” says the Psalmist, “ in thy light shall we see light †,” And in the 21st chapter of the Revelation, and 22d verse, John says, “ I saw no temple

* 1 Cor. xv. 43.

† Ps. xxxvi. 9.

“ therein ; for the Lord God Almighty, and the Lamb
 “ are the temple of it. And the city had no need of
 “ the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it ; for the
 “ glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the
 “ light thereof.” And to the same purpose, chap. 22.
 vers. 5. “ And there shall be no night there, and they
 “ need no candle, neither light of the sun ; for the
 “ Lord God giveth them light. What particular meth-
 od he will take to communicate to us these sublime
 truths, which we are to expect from this omniscient
 master, we cannot tell ; but certainly it will be such as
 will affect us with the most transporting pleasure in re-
 ceiving such divine instructions, and hearing such ra-
 vishing lessons. If the Queen of Sheba was so mo-
 ved at the sight of Solomon’s wisdom and œconomy,
 as to exclaim, “ Happy are thy men, and happy are
 “ these thy servants, who stand continually before
 “ thee, and hear thy wisdom ;” how much more just-
 ly may there be no more spirit left in us, when we
 run over in our thoughts the happy circumstances we
 shall then be in, when we join that noble circle of at-
 tentive admirers, and mix in the joyful crowd that per-
 petually surround the throne of God and of the Lamb ;
 for behold a greater than Solomon is here. Here Solo-
 mon himself shall appear in the midst of these number-
 less hosts, attending these heavenly instructions, and
 learning from the great author of his wisdom. It would
 be almost a degrading of the subject to tell you, that e-
 ven in this world it is a peculiar happiness to study un-
 der the best masters, and attend the lectures of men of
 the greatest genius, and who excel in their several pro-
 fessions : for here at best our teachers are fallible, the
 truths which they are possessed of they have not the fa-
 culty to communicate with the utmost ease and advan-
 tage. Even our blessed Saviour when upon earth, though
 he could, yet he did not think fit to make the fullest
 discoveries. “ He opened his mouth in parables,” and
 “ without a parable spake he not unto them.” “ But
 “ the time cometh,” says he to his disciples, “ when I
 “ no more shall speak unto you in parables, but I shall
 “ shew you plainly of the Father.” Then shall this be
 fulfilled in the most emphatic sense. With what plea-

sure shall we see that blessed mouth opened, that spake as never man spake, and receive instruction from that person that hath endeared himself to us by the most amazing instances of stupendous love! With what incredible delight shall we drink in, at the pure and unmixed fountain, those rivers of intelligence, that shall glide into our inmost souls, and affect us with the most sensible pleasure. But,

5thly, Another circumstance upon which our advancement in knowledge does very much depend, is the company we frequent, and the conversation we are engaged in. We are apt to enter into the spirit, and appropriate the thoughts of our intimate friends; and it is justly looked upon as an uncommon advantage to have our acquaintance among the politest, most intelligent, and most accomplished persons, who are capable to edify us by their agreeable conversation, and by communicating their valuable and useful discoveries. But how happily shall we be situated in this respect, when we "come to
 " an innumerable company of angels, to the general
 " assembly and church of the first-born, to God the
 " judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect." There shall not be one in all that numberless society, who is not perfect in knowledge and in virtue: "For there shall in no wise enter any
 " thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie, but they which are
 " written in the Lamb's book of life *." If even in this world we were to have no other company but such as even Aristotle, Socrates, or Plato, or such divine persons as Moses, David, Solomon, and Paul, what noble advances might we make in knowledge and learning! and how would their agreeable conversation cultivate our natural parts! But what prodigious odds is there in the comparison? Numerous infirmities and imperfections cleave to the best of men while here on earth; but there the dross shall be purged away, and the vessel refined; here we meet with friends that are sometimes sullen and reserved, there they shall be always open and communicative; here they are frequent.

* Rev. xxi. 27.

ly peevish and passionate, there always calm and harmonious; here trifles and impertinence do frequently mix in the politest conversation, there nothing but what is solid and substantial, nothing low and weak, nothing but what is every way worthy of heaven, shall obtain a place in the longest conversation. How swift a progress then shall we make in the arts and sciences of the heavenly country in the society of such companions, where every one shall animate and enrich the mind of his fellow-saint by communicating his discoveries? — If to all these considerations we add,

In the *sixth* and *last* place, That whereas in this life we can scarcely find time to pursue any study to a considerable length; in the other, eternity itself shall never put a period to our inquiries; if we add this, I say, to all the rest, methinks, it will carry this matter as far as the most enlarged wish we can possibly form. How swift a progress do some men make in knowledge! and what a prodigious stock of learning has been acquired in the space of forty or fifty years, with all the imperfections and inconveniencies, all the interruptions and disturbances, that are the unavoidable attendants of human life! How much of our time are we robbed of by the perpetual returns of sleeping, eating, drinking, and a thousand other nameless avocations! But when all these disadvantages shall be removed, when we shall meet with nothing to divert our researches, no night, no insipid, inactive parts of our existence, no interruption of our studies, but in reducing them to practice, perhaps breaking out sometimes in raptures of praise and adoration upon some new and surprising discoveries; — if we add eternity to all this, and then think of the perpetual progression which the saints will be making in the divinest knowledge, our souls will be apt to faint under the unwieldy thought. For my own part, when I pursue them but a little way through this endless duration; when I consider the swiftness of their progress, and think at what amazing heights they may arrive in some of the distant ages, approaching still nearer and nearer, by making further advances to the great pattern of all perfection; when I look still forward to the inexhaust-

ible duration yet to come, till I am lost in contemplation; I confess there is no more spirit in me!

Thus we see how every thing shall be precisely calculated in the future state for making the swiftest advances in knowledge, and how nobly situated the glorified saints shall be for contemplation. But if any one is afraid, from the last consideration, that we shall not have matter enough to furnish us with fresh discoveries, and to keep up the transport of agreeable surprise, and that we may see of what a noble and sublime kind our knowledge shall be, let us,

III. INQUIRE into the object of our knowledge, and see about what we shall be instructed.

And, in general, we are assured, that our knowledge shall be the noblest, and most sublime; for God himself shall be the object of it, the original of all being, the fountain of every perfection, and the source of every excellency. With what infinite delight shall we run over his unbounded perfections, and wander through the glorious attributes of his nature, which shall furnish endless matter for the sublimest contemplation: "For who can by searching find out God? who can find out the Almighty to perfection?" This is what is commonly called the *beatific vision*, and is promised by our Saviour, Matth. v. 8. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God;" and in 1 John, iii. 2. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." And how ravishing a sight must it be! what a rapturous contemplation, to see that being that contains all that is great, all that is noble, all that is worthy, all that is beautiful; to see him in such a manner as is called in the text, "seeing face to face," and "knowing even as also we are known;" to find out fresh glories, and discover new beauties in him, to all eternity. This must certainly be a vision truly *beatific*; especially when we consider, that we shall then see him, not only as God, but as *our* God.

But, more particularly, we shall know him in his nature, his attributes, and his works. As to his nature, although we shall never be able to comprehend it, he

being an *infinite being*, and our spirits in their best and most exalted state, being still finite; yet we shall have such satisfying views of it, as shall for ever put an end to all our perplexities. Infinity and eternity, though undoubtedly attributes of God, are ideas too big for our finite comprehension. That unfathomable mystery of Three in One, and One in Three, how big does it appear with seeming contradictions! It mocks our most careful searches, and baffles our most ingenious attempts to explain it; the more we think on it, the more we find ourselves involved; and the deeper we dive into it, the more we are convinced, that clouds and darkness are round about him. And it is but fit that it should be so, that the infinite being should be inconceivable by us; but still it costs us the greatest toil and difficulty to bend our minds, and submit our reason, to so mysterious a truth; it makes us long to get out of this valley of darkness, and arrive at the land of light. How agreeable must it be, then, to a Christian, to have such a grateful discovery of this matter as shall be an infinite and eternal satisfaction to him. "At that day," says our Saviour, "ye shall know that I am in the Father," John, xiv. 20.; which may perhaps be fitly enough applied here. Then every appearance of contradiction shall totally vanish, and no place shall be left for doubts and difficulties; and though there shall be still something above the reach of our most towering thoughts, yet we shall see and believe the *Trinal unity*, adore and wonder at the glorious mystery.

Again; His attributes and perfections shall likewise furnish matter for the contemplation of the glorified mind. His perfect purity, and spotless holiness; his amazing love, and condescending grace; his justice, his wisdom, his goodness, and faithfulness; his power and dominion; his omniscience and omnipresence; his eternity and immensity; — as they shall all be noble themes for praise and adoration, so they shall likewise be subjects for the most lofty speculations of the blessed. In this world we have some faint ideas of these attributes, drawn from the effects of them, which we see in his works; but it is reasonable to believe, that we shall then have a more intimate and immediate knowledge of them; we

shall "see face to face," and "know even as also we are known."

And then his works shall be a most unbounded field for speculation; the knowledge of which shall be a perpetual source of pleasure and satisfaction to the searchers into them, as well as of praise and glory to their great author, these "works that are honourable and glorious, and sought out of all them that have pleasure in them *." That this will be the subject-matter of our contemplation in heaven, is plain from the tribute of praise we find hence arising, and offered up to God by the redeemed, in the 15th chapter of the Revelations, and 3d verse: "And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty! just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints."—These I shall consider under the distinct heads of creation, providence, and redemption.

First of all, his works of creation, both of the material and immaterial kind, shall certainly be a most entertaining subject of our delightful inquiries. Here we know very little of the intellectual world; but then our acquaintance shall commence, and our communication be enlarged, among all the orders of spirits, these principal parts of the works of God; the thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers; the seraphim and cherubim, angels and archangels. We shall be informed of their nature, powers, and properties; we shall be instructed in their customs and manner of life, and a thousand other things, that now we have no notion of; we shall join ourselves to their company, and mix in their joyful society, hold correspondence with, and reap edification from their entertaining converse: for the apostle tells us, we shall "come to an innumerable company of angels," as well as "spirits of just men made perfect." And though this be by far the noblest part of the creation, and our knowledge of which may, in all probability, afford us the most agreeable pleasure; yet it will be no unentertaining view to survey

* Ps. cxi. 2.

the material part of the creation likewise. If we consider what wonders of nature have been discovered by the sagacious industry of philosophers; what unknown beauties yet lie hid, to be sought out by the more penetrating eye of an exalted spirit; what pleasure and delight all such discoveries are attended with, and what a revenue of glory they raise to the great Author of nature; we will be induced to believe, that this branch of knowledge will be farther cultivated in the other world. Let any one but imagine how long it might detain a celestial philosopher in surveying one single plant or animal; in discovering so many instances of the finest art, and noblest design, as may be met with in the texture and contrivance of these small pieces of matter; what endless variety of surprising wonders he might meet with in our circumambient regions of water, earth, and air: let him ascend to the starry worlds, and think what a glorious figure the sun makes in the midst of his surrounding planets, all of them performing their revolutions, and observing their distances, in the nicest time, and exactest order; what a multiplicity of new scenes might every one of them present us with! but let him proceed forward to the fixed stars, these flaming globes, that even by the best telescopes just twinkle to us, at immense distances; all of them, however, the centers, perhaps, of new worlds of their own, which they supply with light and heat: let his imagination carry him a little way through the boundless depths of æther, still fruitful of fresh discoveries; — and then let him tell me, whether all this may not afford agreeable enough entertainment to a glorified spirit. Those who have any acquaintance with natural philosophy, know that the smallest portion of matter that has dropt from the omnipotent hands of the creator, contains so many curious wonders in it, as deserve the admiration, and would afford a pleasure, even to a celestial inquirer; that there are innumerable instances to be found, of the finest art, and noblest design, in the texture and contrivance of a single plant, or animal, that lie hid from ordinary observation. But if these inconsiderable and diminutive parts of the creation would afford so much matter for the speculations of the blessed, what an inexhaustible fund of entertain-

ment will the vast multiplicity of scenes through every part of the wide creation afford us ! Astronomers assure us, that they can discern, by the help of glasses, a vast many stars which are not discoverable by the naked eye ; and it is hard to tell how many more may be hid through the boundless depth of æther. Now, what a glorious show must those beings be entertained with, that can look into this vast theatre of nature, and see myriads of these flaming globes dispersed through the immense spaces, all of them surrounded perhaps with moving worlds, that roll around them in state and magnificence, obedient to the great creator, and running their appointed courses ! Our eyes may hereafter be strong enough to command this magnificent prospect, and our glorified bodies able to shoot their way with the swiftness of light, and visit the remote regions of the universe. What an inexhaustible fund of entertainment will it be, to know their histories, and be informed of the methods of Providence with respect to these distant parts of the creation ! Not to mention the new creations that may perhaps exist in some future period of eternity.

This may probably be looked upon as the work of imagination, and be rejected as idle fancies ; but be it so, that it is the work of fancy ; and why may not the fancy and imagination assist us in forming to ourselves such images of our future happiness as tend to animate us in our Christian course, and rouse up all the powers of the soul to contend for the mighty prize ; provided we have some ground for so doing ; and that we have, may appear, if we consider, that God does not use to plant in our souls any appetite that is never to be gratified ; that he seems just to have given us such a faint and general knowledge of the beauty of the creation, as serves only to awaken our desires after more ; and to have hung out yon radiant lamps at such an unapproachable distance, and shewed us things so superficially, as is only sufficient to raise our curiosity after a more particular discovery. But what may put this matter beyond any question is, that we find the works of creation are so far contemplated in heaven, that they afford a subject for one of the celestial hymns, Rev. iv. 11.

“Thou art, O Lord, worthy to receive glory, and honour, and power; for thou hast created all things; and for thy pleasure they are, and were created.” And sure these works must not be unworthy of the most exalted creature to study, which his creator thought not unworthy of him to make, and which he looked upon with pleasure, and saw that they were all “very good.” For my own part, I freely indulge myself in the thoughts, that I, who am now confined to crawl up and down this clod of dust, and dimly discern the glorious luminaries of heaven twinkling, at the hugest distance, like glimmering tapers, shall one day be able to range at large from world to world, to measure their magnitudes, calculate their distances, and observe the regularity of their motions; to know the genius and temper of the inhabitants, the scenes of Providence that have been laid in these remote regions; comparing one part with another, then admiring the beauty of the whole, and praising the glorious contrivance: And I find it of use to cherish this generous hope, that has so noble a tendency to inflame the desires, and raise the affections of the soul of man. But,

2dly, The work of Providence shall be another entertaining subject of speculation, when we shall be instructed in the methods of God’s governing and managing the universe. Thus we find the heavenly abodes resounding with acclamations of joy and praise upon some important revolutions of providence, Rev. xix. 1. “And after these things, I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluja! salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: For true and righteous are his judgements; for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornications, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand.” And that this subject is pregnant with an infinite deal of satisfaction, shall appear, if we consider how strangely puzzled we are many times to reconcile the ways of Providence with the essential attributes of the Deity, his wisdom, justice, and goodness. His ways are in the deep, and his paths in the mighty waters; neither are we able to trace the prints of his footsteps, nor to find out the rea-

son of his actings. Besides all the particular dispensations of Providence, that appear to us so big with unfurmountable difficulties; so that we are obliged to cry out, with the apostle, "How unsearchable are his judgements, and his ways past finding out!" But I mention these things only to enhance the glory of our future discoveries, when the curtain shall be drawn, and these brighter scenes disclosed. It is a contradiction to imagine, that the difficulty lies in the things themselves, and not in our partial views of them. The darkest side is often exposed to our view, and that too darkly as through a glass; we know only in part, and see but one or two links of that chain which we shall then perhaps be able to take in at one view; and, by comparing one part with another, discover the beauty and harmony of the whole. With what joyful pleasure shall we then trace out the most intricate steps, and the darkest ways of Heaven, through all the winding mazes, and perplexing labyrinths, in which we have been bewildered! and what a sensible satisfaction shall it be, to observe the divinest wisdom, and most perfect justice, in those dispensations that appear now so puzzling and involved! Then the whole scheme of divine councils shall be unravelled, and the most mysterious pieces of conduct unfolded. And beside these general problems, which we will then find an easy solution of, it would be endless to go through the particular steps of divine providence which we shall then entertain ourselves with, whether with respect to the universe in general, or this world of ours, the church, or every single saint in particular; every thing shall be an inexhaustible subject to feed our intellectual powers, and raise our devotion. What pleasure shall we take in recounting one to another the snares we have escaped, and the dangers we have passed! for then we shall be convinced of that truth we have now so great difficulty to believe, that every thing works together for good to them who are called according to God's purpose, Rom. viii. 28. But,

3dly, The chief and principal subject of our holy meditations shall be the wonders of redemption; and this shall yield us by far the loftiest and sublimest speculations. Our souls shall be rapt into a pleasing amaze-

ment, and lost in sacred transports, while we gaze with unsatiable eyes on these mysteries of man's redemption, that are the result of divine councils, and the glory of an infinite understanding. When we attempt to sound that unfathomable ocean, the dying love of a Redeemer, and find neither breadth, nor length, nor height, to which any measure can be adapted, how shall our powers be overcome in sweet astonishment! When we are admitted into the presence, and allowed with our bodily eyes to view the man Christ Jesus, counting the glories and numberless graces of his person, and looking into the prints of the nails, and wound of the spear, that still remain in his hands and side, what a noble exercise shall it be to our rational powers, to hear him open unto us the eternal councils about this matter in the cabinet of heaven, the covenant of redemption, that was agreed upon between the Father and the Son, when he undertook the mighty enterprise, and cried, *Lo! I come*; to hear him explain the adorable mysteries of the incarnation and hypostatic union, the most distant things, God and man united in one person, for our sakes! With what fixed attention shall we hear him enter upon the execution of this wonderful contrivance! to hear him relate how he left the bosom of the Father, where he sat from all eternity, throned in everlasting bliss and happiness, and though "he thought it no robbery to be equal to God," yet "took upon him the form of a servant!" With what amazement shall we expect the fatal catastrophe!—that this wonderful person, God-man, hung upon a cross, and died; and then, perhaps, he will recount to us the agonies of his soul, and the unsupportable wrath of the Almighty Father, that he endured for our sakes; but crowning all with the success of his exploits, his victories over the powers of darkness, and all our enemies, whom "he made a shew of openly, triumphing over them on his cross," and "ascending on high, leading captivity captive," and giving "gifts unto men." Shall we not be ready to break forth in a sublime rapture, joining the song of the four beasts, and four and twenty elders, whom we find engaged in celebrating the praises of this exalted Redeemer, Rev. v. 12. "Saying with a

“loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.” “Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever.” “Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God, and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”

Thus I have endeavoured, as far as the imperfection of our present state, and my own particular infirmity and weakness, will permit, to represent to you, in a few instances, what will then be the object of our knowledge, or what it is in God which we shall then be informed of. But in discourses on this subject, it must always be remembered, that it is but a very partial and imperfect account of these things we can give. After all we can say, there may be infinite things yet remaining upon this subject, which we have no notion of in this life. The text itself informs us of the weakness of our present understandings; and therefore we may reasonably conclude, that this, as well as the other branches of our happiness, will infinitely surpass and exceed our conceptions of it; for the Apostle John tells us, that although “we are now the sons of God, yet it doth not appear what we shall be; but we know, that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is *.” And the Apostle Paul informs us, “That eye hath not seen, neither hath ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive, what is laid up for those who love God.” I proceed now,

IV. In the *fourth* and *last* place, to name a few properties of our future knowledge. And,

1. In the *first* place, it will be sure and infallible. In this world men of the greatest learning and abilities are subject to a vast number of errors and mistakes. Sometimes the farther they search into these things, they find

* 1 John, iii. 2.

them attended with the greater difficulties, and learn to pronounce upon them with modesty and caution. After we have laboured with a great deal of pains, we can but attain to some probable conjectures, and are far from seeing things with that clearness and certainty which we shall then be able to do, when the glass will be removed, and all the impediments that render the acquisition of knowledge so difficult, will entirely be done away. God himself will be our teacher; and surely whatever we are informed of by him can never be so much as called in question. There will then be no place left for the smallest doubtfulness or uncertainty, but, as our translation of the Psalms expresseth it, "In that purest light of his, we clearly light shall see."

2. Our knowledge in heaven will be acquired with the greatest ease and dispatch. The sublimest and most momentous truths will cost us no manner of toil or difficulty in arriving at them. But as when the sun arises, external objects immediately present themselves to our view, which before were hid under the darkness of the night; so in heaven, that purest light of God which we then shall be blest with, will make all our discoveries to be attended with the greatest ease and dispatch imaginable. Upon earth men sweat and labour after a very small pittance of knowledge; and there is no attaining to any considerable degrees of it, without first spending a great deal of time and thought in learning dead and difficult languages; and even after they begin to know any thing that is valuable, they arrive at it by slow and gradual steps. But in heaven, where God is the immediate source of light, they will have nothing to do but to know and fill their souls as fast as they can receive them with the purest and noblest truths, without any manner of vexation or pain.

3. Our knowledge in heaven will be attended with the greatest pleasure and delight, and will afford us the most agreeable entertainment. Solomon, the wisest of mere men, who had made the largest advances in knowledge, tells us, from his own experience, that in this world "in much wisdom there is much grief; and he that increaseth knowledge, increaseth sorrow," Ecclesi. i. ult.; and that partly because it is acquired with such

hard and wearisome labour both of body and mind, with consumption of his spirits and shortening of his life; partly because he meets with a multiplicity of perplexing difficulties, and many times embraces errors and mistakes instead of truths; and partly because he has thereby a clearer insight into, and a quicker sense of his own ignorance, infirmities, and miseries, and finds the knowledge he has arrived at very unsatisfactory. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. Nothing of this kind shall attend the celestial discoveries, but every new truth we gain will carry along with it the firmest satisfaction, and the noblest pleasure. As knowledge in general has something in it that is very agreeable to a reasonable mind, so those truths particularly which we shall come to the knowledge of in heaven are of such a refined and sublime kind, that they will fill us with a more than ordinary delight. Every discovery that we make in the perfections and attributes of the supreme being, will give us larger and more ravishing views of our own happiness; for it is in the enjoyment and fruition of him that it consists. In short, upon whatever subjects our understandings will be exercised, as we shall become masters of it without any difficulty, so we shall possess our discoveries with the most solid satisfaction and the divinest pleasure.

4. Our knowledge in heaven shall be constant and uninterrupted. Here our understandings are not at all times alike clear and unclouded. Sometimes we have a distincter view of things, and at other times we see them in a fainter and dimmer light. The arguments whereby we are convinced of truths are apt to slip out of our minds, and do not always make an equal impression upon us. Hence we are wavering and inconstant, liable to change our opinions, and shift the sides of a question. But in that perfect state, where God himself is the source and fountain, the cause and author, as well as the object of our knowledge, no cloud shall ever rise to overshadow the understanding, nor shall our knowledge ever be in the least diminished, or suffer the smallest abatement; but to the endless ages of eternity we shall be

continually making progress, and advancing to higher and sublimer truths.

Lastly, Our knowledge in heaven will be practical and efficacious. However scanty the means of our knowledge in this life may be, yet most people know more than they make a good use of. What we do know has not that influence upon our practice that it ought to have; for we several times act against the light of our minds, and do those things which we cannot but know are very foolish and unreasonable. This indeed proceeds from the weakness of the assent that we give to spiritual and divine truths. The knowledge we have of them is so faint, that they do not make an impression upon our minds suitable to their weight and importance; but in the future state our views of things will be so clear and distinct, that it will be impossible for us, in some measure, to act contrary to the dictates of our enlightened understanding. We shall then have such beautiful discoveries of the glorious excellencies and amiable perfections of the divine nature, as that our hearts will be sweetly and easily, yet effectually constrained to love him; and all his holy precepts and commandments will be set in such a reasonable light, that it will appear the most absurd and ridiculous thing in the world to refuse the strictest obedience to them: And thus our knowledge will not only float in our heads, but affect our hearts in the strongest manner, and have a commanding power over the will, the affections, and over all the powers and faculties of the soul.

V. I PROCEED now to draw a few inferences from what has been said. And,

In the *first* place, Hence we see the folly of wicked men, who may perhaps be looked upon by others, and valued by themselves, as men of sense and learning, admired for the sharpness of their wit, and fineness of their parts, and who, upon this account, frequently look down with contempt and disdain upon a plain, simple, honest Christian, while themselves so foolishly neglect the pursuit of that wherein lies the truest wisdom. It is very ordinary in the world to see persons of this character, who, though they may happen to excel some that are truly godly in

the natural endowments of the mind, yet being ignorant of God, the chief good, and neglecting to cultivate the most valuable branches of knowledge, are apt to condemn the weak, though good men, who will certainly appear at length to be much wiser than themselves. A single view of the subject I have been discoursing on may serve to stop the laughter, and turn the foolish jests of the profane wit upon himself; for in the other world it will appear, with the most irresistible evidence, who has been the wiser person of the two. While the bright man has no other addition to his knowledge than what will contribute to make him more sensible of his torments and misery; the plain simple Christian is advancing with the utmost facility through all the parts of the most elevated and most desirable knowledge, and begins now to look down with a noble and divine contempt upon the false wit which was so profusely lavished upon religion and the professors thereof. Ah! my brethren, how mad and foolish are profane sinners, however they may be looked upon by the men of this world, if they have no taste for this refined happiness! All the accomplishments and improvements of the mind which are attainable in this transitory world, dwindle away into despicable nothings, in comparison with this exalted state of glorified souls. One moment in heaven, and one glance of that purest light of God, will set the soul of a good man infinite degrees beyond that of the most ingenious sinner upon earth; so that nothing will appear in so absurd and ridiculous a light, as the reproaches that are thrown by the wicked upon good men for a choice which will then appear to have been so just and so wise. And therefore,

2. This doctrine is big with comfort and satisfaction to the sincere, though weak believer, who is truly humbled for his own ignorance and darkness of mind. How afflicted are poor Christians sometimes because they know so little of God and of Christ, and are ignorant of many things, which it would be an advantage for them to know? However scanty the measure of their knowledge be now, yet when once they are arrived at the regions of immortality, it shall be so large and satisfying, as shall for ever put an end to all their perplexi-

ties. The difficulties that we meet with in some of the doctrines of religion are sometimes sufficient to stagger the faith of a weak Christian, so that he finds it a hard enough matter to give his assent to them; but then every thing will appear to him in so clear and distinct a light, and shine upon his enlightened mind with so strong an evidence, as will leave no room for doubts and difficulties. All our knowledge (if we may speak so) will consist of first principles. There will be no probable uncertain opinions, where the light is so piercing and pure. And then it gives a great deal of uneasiness to good men, to see so many disputes and debates, so many controversies carried on with keenness and heat, and oft times with no little anger and passion, among those who should excel in meekness, and love, and charity, which tend so much to eat out the life and power of religion, and unsettle the minds of weaker Christians. But let us look forward to those blissful times, when we shall have got above all the mists that are so apt to over-shade our minds in these lower regions, when all those wrathful passions, that are so ready to intermix in our searches after truth, shall have entirely left us; that pride, and impatience of contradiction, which is the source of so much contention in this world, shall be entirely purged away. There shall then be no difference of opinion, but the most perfect concord and harmony. We shall then, with the perfectest agreement and unanimity, join together in admiring the glorious truths, which we shall all be equally convinced of, and look back with wonder upon all the little scuffles and contentions that we have had with one another in this world, which embittered our hearts, and soured our spirits against one another. And indeed, my brethren, the consideration of these things may fill us with shame for the uncharitable divisions and bitter animosities that do so much reign among Christians who differ from one another. Why, this is not the land of infallibility! The best of us while here are subject to manifold errors and mistakes; for "we know but in part, and prophesy but in part," as the apostle tells us in the 9th verse of this chapter: and again in our text, "for we see
" but through a glass, darkly, and know only in part."

Our knowledge is far from having arrived at that perfect state, so as to give us a right to exercise dominion over our neighbour's faith, and be angry and quarrel with them for not seeing things with *our* eyes, and in the same light that we do. Let it rather be our business to aim at the exercise of that noble Christian grace, which is so strongly recommended by the apostle in this chapter where our text lies, namely, an universal charity; for he tells us in the 2d verse of the chapter, that "though we have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, yea, though we have all faith, so that we could remove mountains, and have no charity, we are nothing." But,

3dly, The principal use I would make of this doctrine, is an use of exhortation. And O that the consideration of what has been said may stir us up, may rouse, and awaken us to the utmost diligence and activity in the pursuit of so noble and so perfect a state of happiness! O glorious day! when God himself is the sun, without any mixture of darkness or night, no spot or blemish, and no cloud to hide it from our eyes; when our knowledge shall be as large as the wishes and capacity of an exalted soul. How should the prospect of this ravish and transport us! and what dull and stupid souls must they be, upon which this can make no impression! I told you before, that my great design in discoursing to you upon this subject is, that our hearts might be thereby animated with a holy vigour, and inspired with a noble ardour and warmth, in running the race that is set before us; because there is nothing that seems to be so proper for this purpose, as the meditation upon that glorious prize which is at the end of our course. Whenever we begin to droop and languish in the ways of religion, let us look forward, and consider what is the prize we are contending for; a prize that is sufficient, methinks, to renew our fainting spirits, and make us redouble all our efforts. This was the effect it had upon the Apostle Paul; he looked, "not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen;" and so, "although his outward man decayed, yet his inward man was renewed day by day." The happiness of the saints in heaven may be consider-

ed in several views. I have considered it in that view which cannot miss, I think, to have some influence upon such as have any taste for that which has been always looked upon as the most valuable thing amongst men. One man is distinguished from another, as well as all men are distinguished from the beasts, by their superior endowments of mind, and their different degrees of understanding. Men of the best sense have always been esteemed the most valuable part of the species; and there is nothing that men are more ashamed of, and take worse from their neighbours, than the imputation of ignorance and stupidity. Would we not think it the happiest thing that ever befel us, to be advanced, all of a sudden, to that height of knowledge which some particular persons in the world have arrived at, who have outshined others by the superior brightness of their parts, and have been admired in all ages as prodigies of sagacity and penetration? Now here is a way whereby all of us may become wiser than Solomon, if not in this world, yet in another, where our knowledge shall be large as our wishes, and where we shall be made to outshine the greatest personages that ever made any figure in the world; where our capacities shall be so large, and our knowledge so extensive, that we may look back upon the most towering heights, and the most admired advances in science that any mortal ever arrived at, as we do now on the blunders and absurdities of children. The apostle, in the chapter preceding that wherein our text lies, had been discoursing upon the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit that were peculiar to the Christians of these primitive times, which he concludes with these words: "Covet earnestly the best gifts; and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way." So say I unto you, let men fall upon all the methods that they can think of, to improve their minds, and excel the herd of mankind; and yet hereby I can shew you a more excellent way, and the surest method to be endued with every thing that is valuable and praise worthy. Endeavour to have an interest in that noble inheritance of the saints in light; and then, however you may be exceeded in some things by wicked men up-

on earth, yet to all eternity you shall excel the most learned sinner in knowledge, infinitely farther than Solomon himself outstripped the stupidest idiot.

My brethren, I cannot think but this argument must influence the greatest part of us, if we allow ourselves seriously to think on it, because it meets with a friend within us, even that ambition which seems so natural to the mind of man. Let us then seriously reflect upon the subject; let us consider the glorious circumstances of the saints in heaven; and, by this consideration, let us be excited, with our whole soul and strength, to such a course of conduct, as may intitle us to partake of that infinite happiness which shall be bestowed upon them who, "by a patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality." The things that you have been hearing are not to be considered only as matters of nice speculation: No; the design of my laying them before you, is not to feed your curiosity, but to be a powerful motive to engage you, with all your might, to pursue after so rich an enjoyment. And let me tell you, my brethren, that there is no possessing this beatific vision without holiness of heart, and purity of life. Our blessed Saviour gives us the character of such as shall see God in the 5th chapter of Matthew, and 8th verse, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." And the apostle tells us, "That without holiness no man shall see the Lord *." I shall conclude all with that passage in the 3d chapter of 1 John, 2d and 3d verses: "Beloved, now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know, that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as he is pure."

* Heb. xii. 14.

S E R M O N II.

LUKE, xvi. 23.

And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

MY brethren, the consideration of these exquisite and unsupportable torments, which the scriptures assure us will be the inevitable and everlasting portion of impenitent sinners in the world to come, seem at first sight to be a motive of such powerful and irresistible force for engaging us in a religious course, that it may be justly surprising to consider how very few there are who are suitably influenced by it. When, on the one hand, we consider the nature of a human soul, how desirous, how fond of its own happiness, and how averse from, how shocked at, the very thoughts of endless misery; and when, on the other hand, we reflect on these infallible assurances which the scriptures have given us, that the most inconceivable torments, both for kind and duration, will be the certain consequence of impenitency; would any body be ready to imagine, (if experience had not sufficiently convinced us of it), that one, who is in the least capable of thought or reflection, would so obstinately persist in a course of life which he cannot but know will cost him so intolerably dear?

Indeed, my brethren, such a conduct appears to me so absurd and horridly inconsistent, that I cannot think the persons who resolutely adhere to an irreligious course of life, have such a constant and firm persuasion of a future state of rewards and punishments, as in other cases would be sufficient to influence their practice. And as this cannot proceed from any

want of evidence, the only way we can account for it is, that the present sensible objects of this world make so deep an impression upon the minds of sinners, that they never allow themselves seriously and impartially to consider the future and invisible things of another life. So entirely are their affections, and all the powers of their souls, prepossessed with, and pre-engaged to, the transitory vanities of this perishing state, that they only rove from vanity to vanity, from one hurtful enjoyment to another, from one disappointment to the pursuit of that which still will end in disappointment, thoughtless and indifferent about the eternal consequences of such a conduct.

But, oh ! my brethren, let me admonish you, in the most serious and solemn manner, that whether you allow yourselves to think on these things or not, the time is coming, when you *will*, when you *must*, think on them. Though you do not suffer yourselves now to reflect upon the consequences of your conduct, because they are at a distance, how will you escape such reflections when once you begin to feel them in the most sensible manner ; when, instead of being at a distance, they shall be present in every member of your bodies, in every faculty of your souls, in every moment of your existence ; when, instead of being able to put the evil day far from you, you shall find it has already overtaken you with the vengeance of Omnipotence ? These are things which, sooner or later, we *must* think upon. The only, though very considerable difference is, that if we be so wise as to think upon them now, it may save us from feeling them hereafter ; whereas, if we resolve to free ourselves from such uneasy reflections here, we must lay our account to endure them through all eternity. *Now* it is in our power to avoid the dismal consequences of sin, *then* the case will be past all remedy ; *now* grace and mercy may be had, the gates of heaven are still open, *then* the doors will be finally shut, or, as our Saviour expresses it in this parable, the great *gulf will be then fixed*, over which none will be able to pass. And therefore, seeing so few can be prevailed upon, in this their

day, to consider the things that belong to their eternal happiness or misery, it is my purpose at this time to represent unto you, what will be the reflections of a stupid and inconsiderate sinner when he shall be awakened out of his thoughtless security with the flames of hell about his ears. If you will not think now, when thinking may do you good, see what your thoughts will be, when thinking will be a part of your punishment! "And in hell," says our Saviour, "he lift up his eyes, "being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and "Lazarus in his bosom."

These words are a part of that instructive parable concerning the rich man and Lazarus, wherein our Saviour represents the different fates of good and bad men, especially of the last, in so moving and affecting a manner, as might be sufficient, if any thing of this kind were so, to prevail on foolish men to abandon that course of life which will have such a sad and deplorable issue. In order to this end, he represents unto us, first the different states of a godly man, and an irreligious one, in this world, and that with as much advantage to sin, and disadvantage to religion, as the men of this world could paint to themselves in their own imagination. The wicked man is represented as one that is possessed of every thing that he could desire for the gratification of his lusts, rioting in wealth and pleasure, clothed with purple, &c. : on the other hand, the good man is represented as one groaning under the heaviest calamities of human life, poor, mean, and despised, extremely pained, as well as destitute of daily bread; in short, a naked, sick, and starving beggar. Now, if we were to look no farther than this world, who would not chuse the condition of the first rather than that of the second? But behold the different ends of these two persons, and you will change your sentiments. Why? in a little time the scene is considerably changed. Death seizes them both, and puts a final, an everlasting period to the false, though glittering happiness of the one, and to the real, though partial and comparatively inconsiderable misery of the other. No sooner does the soul of Lazarus leave its crazy habitation, but it is carried by the angels in-

to heaven, and lodged in the bosom of Abraham, which is one of these expressions whereby the Jews described the future happiness of the blessed. But now, on the other hand, what becomes of the happy rich man? where is now all his pomp and greatness? where all his riches and treasures? He is dignified, indeed, with a splendid and pompous funeral, a dignity which he feels as much as the coffin in which he is carried; but after that, can you pursue his temporal enjoyments any further? Where is his purple and fine linen? If any of it goes to the grave with him, it but rots, and moulders into dust. Where is all his sumptuous fare, his delicate and costly feasts? He himself is now become food to the worms, which, without ceremony or distinction, crawl over that body which was formerly pampered with so much cost and ease. In a word, what is become of all his earthly treasures? all the gratifications of sense, his carnal and sinful enjoyments? They are all laid in the grave with himself, and are now, and shall for ever be no more. “Know-
 “est thou not,” says Zophar, “that the triumphing
 “of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite
 “but for a moment,” Job, xx. 5. But then, as to his soul, that immortal part of him that survives the body, and does not accompany it to the grave, we have a more particular account of it with respect to its new situation in the verse which I have read: “And
 “in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and
 “seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bo-
 “som.”

Where we may observe, 1. The place and circumstances in which the soul of the rich man finds itself immediately upon its dissolution; — in hell, and in torments: — “In hell he lift up his eyes,” &c. O dismal abode! O dreary habitation! What a sudden change! what a prodigious alteration is here! It was but just now that we found him shining in purple, and wallowing in the midst of luxurious pleasures; but, ah! “how
 “soon is thy pomp brought down to the grave, and the
 “noise of thy viols ceased! How art thou fallen from
 “heaven, O Lucifer! son of the morning!” to allude to the words of the prophet concerning the King of Ba-

bylon, Is. xiv. It was but a little since he was lodged in a stately and magnificent palace; yet now he is brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit. It was but a little since he was feasting on the choicest dainties, drinking the richest and most generous wines, and feeding on the most delicate and costly dishes; now he is tormented in flames of sulphur and brimstone. What would he give for a drop of water from the tip of one's finger to cool his tongue! Art thou also, might the miserable inhabitants of these dismal regions say, art thou also become wretched as we? art thou become like unto us?

2. We have in these words the effect which this mighty change had upon his mind: "He lift up his eyes." As for the eyes of his body, they were now closed in death, and laid in the grave, a feast to the worms; but as corporeal acts are in scripture attributed to God, so likewise to separate spirits. It was the eyes of his mind which he is now represented as lifting up. He now began to reflect, he now began to consider, what he was, and what he had been doing. There is a great deal of eloquence and beauty in the expression, "And in hell he lift up his eyes;"—intimating to us the inconsiderateness and thoughtlessness of sinners in this life. They never begin to reflect till once they be in hell, but stupidly dream away their lives without thought or consideration: "In hell he lift up his eyes;" for the first time, we may well imagine, that ever he had done so. He never lift up his eyes before; he never reflected what would be the end of his wicked courses; but now, when it was too late, he begins to consider. O the stupidity of impenitent sinners, who run on blindly without ever considering, till consideration can do them no good, without ever reflecting, till the force of their torments obliges them to it, when it can serve no other purpose but to enrage their consciences, and multiply their stings!

3. We have the subject of these his dismal reflections: "And seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom." Our Saviour represents him as seeing that which probably came into his mind. Feeling his own condition, he began to consider the happy state of the

poor man whom he had neglected. His own torments were too violently and too sensibly felt by him, not to be the subject of his reflections. But he is represented as reflecting likewise on the joys of heaven, and the happiness of the blessed, from which he is now for ever excluded, and upon the happiness of such particular persons as he had contemned and despised in this world. Lazarus is the person, the neglect of whom is the great sin here charged upon the rich man, and which had contributed considerably to plunge him into that miserable state. This would bring the whole train of his past life into his mind, and enrage his conscience with the bitter reflection on all the errors of his former conduct; — on all the trifling pleasures which he had made such a mighty account of, and for which he had bartered his soul; — on all the happiness which he had thereby irrecoverably lost, and which a person so contemptible in his eyes as Lazarus was now in possession of; — and on all the dreadful and everlasting torments which he had purchased to himself by the bargain.

IN discoursing to you a little farther from these words, I shall only endeavour to represent unto you, from the account which our Saviour gives us here, the circumstances in which a damned sinner will find himself, and the bitter reflections which he may justly be supposed to make, upon his arrival in that dismal place of everlasting torment. And then, since your time will scarcely allow me to speak even upon this head at any length, I shall conclude, when I have given you an instance or two of these reflections, with making application to ourselves of what may be said.

I. IN the *first* place, then, I am to represent to you, in a few instances, how the mind of the damned sinner will be employed, when he shall have such different views of things as the other world will present him with. Wicked men will not be prevailed with to think upon eternity, when they may do it with so much advantage; — they will not think upon heaven and hell now, when it is in their power to avoid the one, and to obtain the

other. And, like our Saviour in the parable where our text lies, I now call upon you to consider, if this may possibly have any tendency to strike you, what will be your thoughts of these things at that period when you shall be obliged to think upon them, and when your state shall be unalterably fixed for eternity. And I chuse the rather to lay these reflections before you, because they appear, both from the account which our Saviour gives of them in this passage, and from the state and circumstances that things and persons will then be in; I say, they appear to be such as, if seriously considered, can scarcely fail to have a very powerful influence upon the mind.

Now, the thoughts of a damned wretch, when once he has landed in the infernal regions, those dismal abodes of eternal horror and despair, and the terrible place of his everlasting torment, must run, either on his present state, (I mean the state in which he will then be in, which he will find to be present), or upon the state and condition which he formerly enjoyed in this world, or upon the state which he will be in through all eternity.

First of all, the present state, which a damned sinner will then find himself in, cannot but be a very dismal object of his thoughts, and afford abundant matter for the bitterest and most wounding reflections. Now, as to his present state, his thoughts will run, either upon that glorious happiness from which he is excluded, and to which he sees others advanced, or upon that intolerable misery which is his own dreadful portion. In a word, heaven and hell, those great and awful subjects, which he formerly refused to meditate upon, must necessarily *now* be the subject of his melancholy thoughts. Both of these are intimated by our Saviour in the text, where he says, "That the rich man seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom;" and, "That he was in hell when he lift up his eyes, and in torment." Now, not to mention other views that he may then have of, or other reflections that he may then be supposed to make upon these subjects, I shall only mention these two, so different from the views that wicked men, as appears by their actions, permit themselves to have of them now: 1st, He will then see and find the

infallible certainty and reality of these things; 2dly, He will then see and find the infinite greatness and importance of them; and upon each of these he may be supposed to make proper reflections.

1. An impenitent and unbelieving sinner, when once he is fairly landed in the infernal regions, will then be sufficiently convinced, that heaven and hell are no dreams of the imagination. In this world, perhaps, he was apt to scoff at these things, as the inventions of a melancholy brain; or, at best, he did not give himself the trouble to inquire whether they were so or not; but chose his portion in this life, as if there was not a future state of happiness or misery. Hence we find wicked men called unbelievers, or infidels, in the 28th verse: "For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come in to this place of torment." But, ah! how strangely does he find himself disappointed now! what a dreadful conviction, what a terrible demonstration of those things has he now met with! These he finds now to be things which it is impossible for him to reason himself out of. That there is a hell for the punishment of the wicked, and into which all they that forget God are turned, the severe sense which he now has of it will not suffer him any longer to doubt: "And in hell," says our Saviour, "he lift up his eyes, being in torment." And from the assurance that he has of heaven likewise, from which he finds himself banished, it is represented in my text as strong as if he actually saw it with his bodily eyes, and was an envious witness of those joyful raptures, and that fulness of pleasures, which the celestial inhabitants perpetually enjoy: "And seeth Abraham a far off," &c.

And now, may we not justly suppose the best entertainment of such a departed spirit, upon this view of things, to consist of such reflections as these: Fool, as well as wretch, that I have been! ever to doubt of this future state of rewards and punishments, or at least never to trouble my head whether the things which I was told of them were true or not. Ah! now where is all the vain confidence, all the fool-hardiness, with which I was wont to slight such certain truths as this which

I now so severely feel ! Did I not formerly doubt, whether there was a heaven for the reward of the virtuous ? Oh ! yonder it is ; — but afar off from me, upon whom I find its gates are for ever shut. I see Abraham, I see Lazarus, in the midst of these rivers of pleasures, which overflow these envied happy souls with a full tide ; — I see many of his poor neighbours, whom I was wont to mock and ridicule. Yonder are they now set down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the blissful kingdom of their Father, while I am quite shut out. Have I not sometimes laughed at the foolish stories, as I then thought, of hell to punish sinners, as if it had been only an empty bugbear to frighten fools in the dark ? Ah ! what an effectual stop is now put to such daring and presumptuous language ! O stupid, O fatal mistake ! Now I am convinced indeed. Now I believe indeed, ay, and tremble too. I feel it, — I feel it. — But,

2. As a damned sinner will then be in such a manner convinced of the certainty and reality of heaven and hell, so he will then likewise see and find the infinite greatness and importance of them. That impenitent sinners for ordinary in this life are not sufficiently apprised of the infinite importance and incomprehensible greatness of these things, appears too plainly from the slight impression they make upon their minds, and the small and inconsiderable influence which they have on their practice. Did they indeed firmly believe, that the torments of hell are so exquisitely great, both in their kind and duration, as they are represented in scripture to be, is it presumeable, that they would so rashly venture upon them ? that they would, with so little fear or dread, continue in the practice of these sins, that will bring them to it ? Or did they firmly believe the inconceivable fulness of that joy which is at God's right hand for evermore, would they really make so small an account of it ? When we see them every day preferring the most contemptible trifles, the most transitory and perishing pleasures, to that everlasting happiness, which is represented to them in scripture as so incomparably beyond all temporal enjoyments, is not this a demonstra-

tion, that these descriptions do not make a deep enough impression upon them, and have not met with all the credit from them which they deserve? But when once their souls are departed to the other world, and lodged in the bottomless pit, in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, how prodigiously will their sentiments of these things be changed! Which of the most daring and hardened wretches will be able to contemn the flames of hell, when he actually feels them about his ears, when he would give ten thousand worlds, if it were possible, to purchase but one single drop of water to cool his tormented tongue? Will he then, think you, have no deeper impression of the importance of these things than he had in this world, when he ventured upon them for the gratification of a sensual appetite? No, my brethren. If we do not now consider the greatness and importance of the future things of an invisible world, in such a manner as to influence our practice, we shall then be convinced of them to our dreadful cost. A damned soul, who is bewailing his utter exclusion from the mansions of bliss, and groaning under the insupportable weight of almighty wrath, has other notions of heaven and hell than we can be possessed of in this world. So that we may imagine him to vent what will then be his sense of these things in such enraged and self-upbraiding reflections as these: Are yon celestial enjoyments which the glorified saints above are exalted to the possession of, the heaven which I formerly thought so little of? Is this indeed the glorious and inconceivable happiness which I so foolishly despised? these the joys before which I preferred the most contemptible trifles? Is that — O madman that I have been! is that exalted bliss the reward which I would not bestow the smallest pains in endeavouring to obtain; nay, which I undervalued to such a wretched degree, as to barter and exchange it for a transitory dream, for perishing vanity, every empty and delusive shadow of pleasure that came in my way? and are these dismal horrors, these unsupportable torments, the things which I so slighted the threatenings of? Is this the place I made so small account of, which I ventured on for the sake of a false and momentary pleasure? Oh! had I had but the same impressions of

the greatness of these important things then which I have now, what a different life would I have led? But now, alas! I am convinced too late; now I have nothing left but to suffer, and that eternally.

Thus I have given you an instance or two of these reflections of a damned sinner, which may arise from the consideration of his present state. But to shew you what a continual spring of new anguish and terror, whatever side he can turn his thoughts unto will prove, let us proceed, in the next place, to the reflections which a damned sinner may be supposed to make upon the state which he was formerly in, while in this world: and that this will be another spring of bitter anguish and torment to him, is evident from the answer which Abraham returns to the rich man's request, vers. 25. "Son, remember that in thy lifetime thou had thy good things, and Lazarus his evil things."

And, in the general, we may observe upon this head, that the whole train of their past lives will then be set before them in the ugliest colours, and in the most enraging and self-tormenting view. Conscience will then act its part as the never-dying worm that lies gnawing within them: "There the worm dieth not," says our Saviour, Mark, ix. 44. Their memories will then be found so faithful and tenacious, that all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and all the hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against God and Christ, shall rise up as witnesses against them; the thoughts of which, like old vultures, shall prey upon their vitals, and torment them with the most irresistible fury. Then every sin, stripped of the bewitching charms wherewith it is disguised in this world, shall appear in all the amazing extravagancy of the stupidest madness and folly, to the utter confounding of the guilty wretches with shame, anguish, horror, and despair. Then every instance of their rebellion against God, every breach of his holy law, and every indulgence of their corrupt lusts, shall stare them out of all countenance, and make them feel the smartest and most sensible twinges. But in order to represent to you, in some measure, the confounding horror of this dismal prospect, I shall only (omitting several other things that

might be taken notice of upon this occasion) insist a little more particularly on these two circumstances, which cannot miss to afford the bitterest and most wounding reflections. *1st*, The littleness and vanity of all the motives and temptations, whereby he was induced to venture upon that almighty displeasure which he now feels the weight of; and, *2^{dly}*, The many and valuable opportunities of being saved, and the many offers of grace and mercy, which he has slighted and lost for ever, will now vex and torment the damned wretch with the most distracting inquietude of thought.

1st, The damned sinner will then be convinced what a pitiful and wretched bargain he has made, when the rewards which he had for his wickedness will then appear to him in all their contemptible vanity and littleness. The only happiness that sinners can propose to themselves in the indulging of their lusts, and the prosecution of their corrupt inclinations, must be supposed to lie in a more plentiful flow, either of the riches, or the pleasures, or the honours of this world. These are the only rewards that sin can promise us, and it is for the sake of them that wicked men are every day hazarding their eternal state. While in this world they look upon these, no doubt, as mighty fine things, which they will not part with upon any account. Well, now let us imagine that every sinner had succeeded as well in the pursuit of these things as the rich man in the parable, where our text lies, is supposed to have done; that each of them had been "clothed in purple and fine linen," &c. Now the scene is changed, and he hears that doleful remembrance sounding in his ears, "That thou in thy lifetime received thy good things," while others, who led a religious life, "their evil things; but now they are comforted, and thou art tormented." How terribly must we suppose him to condemn himself upon the final casting up of his accounts! Now he gets time to reflect what a fine purchase he has made; to remember what he sold his eternal welfare for, and what it was that he had for heaven. When he compares the pleasures of sin with the value of the recompence of reward, which he forsook for these pleasures, how will the vast disproportion astonish him? When he thinks,

on the one hand, of a few merry hours, a few pleasant cups, or sweet morsels, a little carnal mirth, or low delight to the flesh, which was all he can pretend to have gained by sin, and which are now all past and gone for ever; and when he reflects, on the other hand, upon that everlasting glory and inconceivable happiness which he thereby forfeited, and this eternal and intolerable misery which he has thereby procured to himself; ah! how will these thoughts tear his very heart, and vex him with anguish and remorse? To sell a large estate for a feather, and to exchange a jewel for a barley-corn, will then appear to him as instances of the highest wisdom, and pieces of admirable conduct, in comparison of his behaviour. For there are two things concerning the enjoyments of this life which he will then be fully convinced of: 1. That they were but trifling in their nature; and, 2. That they were but transitory as to their duration, in comparison of these exquisite and eternal enjoyments which he is now left to bewail the loss of. So true is it what our Saviour teaches us in that pathetic expostulation, Matth. xvi. 26. "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

So that we may easily imagine a damned sinner to be exclaiming against his folly in such reflections as these, upon his former unlawful pleasures: Oh! deservedly miserable wretch! Is this all that I had for my soul, all that I had for giving up my title to heaven? Did I set my soul to sale on so base a price? Did I part with my God for a little dirt and dross? Did I prefer a fit of sensual pleasure to the exquisite joys of heaven? Did I barter my immortal soul, and venture upon these insupportable torments, for a few moments of such carnal mirth and jollity, as I find now to have been but like the crackling of thorns under a pot? Oh! for how small a matter have I parted with my happiness? I have had but a poor unsatisfying dream for my hopes of heaven, and now I am awaked, it is all vanished. Where are now my honours and attendance? where is my gold and my silver? where are now my cups and my jolly companions, and all my other sensual pleasures? Alas!

if I had them, what would they signify? what pitiful and contemptible things are they, in comparison with yonder joys wherewith those are now, and shall be forever solaced, who once so justly pitied my stupid manner of life, in comparison with those rivers of pleasures which I am now for ever excluded from? Ah! transitory and delusive dream of worldly pleasure! how came I to be so bewitched with thee? Now my sweetest morsels are turned into gall, and my wine into wormwood. They delighted me no longer than when they were passing down; when once they were past my taste, the pleasure perished. And is this all I have had for the inestimable treasure? What if I had gained all the world, and lost my soul? Even in that case, how sad an exchange would I have made? But, alas! how small a part of the world was it for which I gave up my part in glory? Oh! that sinners would but consider these things in time, which, if they do not, they will have leisure to reflect on through all eternity in another manner. But,

2dly, Among the other reflections which a damned sinner will have upon his past life, he will no doubt find himself exceedingly tormented with the consideration of the many valuable opportunities which he had of being saved, and the many precious offers of grace and mercy which he contemned, and which are now irrevocably past, and lost for ever. Such especially who have been hearers of the gospel, as all of you are, will find this part of their reflections intolerably severe; and in this respect, as well as others, will find that saying verified, "That it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgement than for them." Why, they had not only in this world opportunities and time in abundance to have made up their peace with God, but they were frequently called upon in the most earnest manner, and beseeched by God himself, who declared, that he had no pleasure in their death, to repent, return, and live. Oh! how the thoughts of all the precious opportunities, which he has now so irrecoverably slipped, will torment the damned sinner? how fresh will the remembrance of every awakening sermon be then in his mind, as if he still saw the preacher, and

heard him calling upon him to pity his soul, to pity himself, and not wilfully and cruelly plunge himself into the bottomless ocean of misery. What self-condemning pangs will it raise within them to remember how often "Jesus would have gathered them, as a hen
"gathereth her chickens under her wings, and they
"would not!" How will it rend their souls with rage and fury against themselves, to think, that after all the pains that could be taken on them, they still continued obstinate to the most moving entreaties, and deaf to the loudest calls both of God and men; till now at last they find it out of their power to help themselves, inso-much that they will be ready to tear out their very hearts for anger and revenge.

Ah! says the poor self-condemned wretch, how justly is all this befallen me? 'Time was when I might have prevented it, as well as others have done, if I had been but so wise. If I had behaved myself as I might, and ought to have done in a state of probation, wherein I was placed as well as others, I might have been amongst yonder blessed saints, who are now tormented with these damned fiends. Ah! what fair opportunities have I irrecoverably lost? How many days, and weeks, and months, and years, did I squander away to no purposes but bad ones, which, if I had improved, I might now have been happy? Wretch that I was! had I time for mirth and diversion, and none for religion? Had I time to procure some of the bread that perisheth, and none for that which endureth unto everlasting life? Oh! precious time, whither art thou fled? Cannot so much as one of those invaluable days ever be recalled, one of those golden hours? O! how speedily would I repent! how earnestly would I pray! how strictly would I live! but now, alas! I may cry to eternity, but it is to no purpose. As I was deaf formerly to all the calls and intreaties that were made to me, and continued unmoved at the most passionate exclamations, and the most lively representations of my danger; so now I am given up to the merciless rage of these flames, that are as deaf to all my wailings and complaints, and to these fiends, who are but as unrelenting now to me as I was formerly to God. But, oh! my wretched soul, wert thou not fairly warned of this in time,

“ That because God called, and ye refused, he would mock at your calamity,” &c. Prov. i. 24.—32. Not one of the devils, now my dreadful companions, did ever let slip such fair opportunities, or resist such moving entreaties to be saved as I have done. O happy devils, in comparison of me ! O happy Sodomites, in comparison of me ! Methinks, if it were not for this wounding reflection, that I had so many opportunities of salvation, so many invitations to happiness, which I had the folly to flight and contemn, my heart would not be so grievously rent.

Thus you see what doleful reflections the consideration of the state he formerly was in will afford to a damned sinner. But the most cutting, the most rending of all his reflections will be those that arise from the consideration of the state in which he will be through all eternity. If there were but the least prospect of any end to their torments, it would be some sort of relief ; but who can possibly support himself against the consideration of this, that their misery shall never have an end ? That word *everlasting* will no doubt sound the most dreadfully in their ears of any in their sentence. “ Depart from me,” is terrible ; — “ Depart into fire,” is terrible ; — but “ Depart into everlasting fire,” is altogether intolerable. Oh ! my brethren, consider in time what a dismal prospect a damned sinner will be presented with, when he looks forward into that inexhaustible duration that is yet to come, and considers, that after he has lain thousands of millions of ages under the Almighty displeasure, his torments will be as fresh as at that very instant ; that when he has run over in his mind as many ages as it is in the power of man to put together in numbers, his misery will then be but just at the beginning ; and that as eternity will never be exhausted, so it will be impossible for him ever to escape this place of torment. So we find Abraham assuring the rich man in this parable, vers. 26. “ And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed : so that they who would pass from hence to you, cannot ; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence.” Oh ! eternity, will the damned sinner be ready to say, thou dreadful thought ! what ex-

quisite and insupportable torments are reserved in thy bosom through endless ages for me ! And must I indeed pass through every weary moment of this endless duration ? Is there really no period to be expected of this insupportable misery ? no end ? no, not the smallest intermission. Oh ! death, whither art thou now gone ? Oh ! that these pains would break my heart, and end my being. Oh ! that I had never had a being. These groans will the thoughts of eternity wring from their hearts ; these despairing, these tormenting groans. “ O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end ! ”

WE shall now conclude with making some application to ourselves of what has been said.

My brethren, the great design which I aim at in representing to you these exceeding bitter reflections of a damned sinner in the other world is, that I may prevail with you if possible, by such a representation, to take such serious thoughts of these things now as may prevent these doleful reflections hereafter ; and this is only enlarging upon the design of our blessed Saviour in the parable where my text lies. Finding secure sinners so much in love with their present case, as to be extremely averse from giving themselves such disturbance as the thoughts of a future state would necessarily be attended with, he here falls upon one of the most effectual, at least likely methods, to awaken them out of their fatal lethargy, namely, by introducing a damned sinner, and thereby representing unto them, in a very lively manner, what must one day be their case, if they do not prevent it by laying these things seriously to heart in time.

I am sensible indeed, O secure and impenitent sinner ! that I am proposing but a disagreeable and unwelcome subject to your thoughts ; and perhaps some of you may be ready to say, as those two miserable possessed persons did to our Saviour, Matth. viii. 29. “ Art thou come hither to torment us before the time ? ” And indeed, my brethren, I confess, that the serious consideration of this subject must effectually disturb an impenitent sinner, and give such of you a considerable alarm ; and therefore, if either by your casting off these thoughts, you

could likewise save yourselves from the more wounding and more dismal reflections hereafter; or, if I thought your present ease were preferable to your eternal welfare, and the present disturbances which these reflections may occasion were to be laid in the balance with everlasting torments; or, if any other argument had a greater likelihood of prevailing with you to work out your eternal salvation; I say, if either of these were the case, I should not alarm you with such needless apprehensions, but insist on more soft and pleasing subjects. But if I consider, that by your casting off such thoughts and reflections as these, which I am proposing to your serious consideration, you are thereby in the most wretched and fatal manner imposing upon yourselves, and lulling yourselves so fast asleep, that eternal destruction is getting the surer and faster hold of you, and will come upon you with the more terrible vengeance; when I consider, that any present uneasiness which these reflections may give you, is by no means to be compared with these eternal torments, which are the native consequence of your present security; in a word, when I consider, that no other arguments can have such a powerful influence upon persons in your circumstances: I say, when these things are duly considered, you will forgive me, if, knowing the terrors of the Lord, I insist with all possible earnestness and importunity, that you will once take them into your serious thoughts.

In the *first* place, Tell me, O thoughtless and inconsiderate sinner! (for this is a matter of no small moment and importance), can you, do you think, by casting off the thoughts of these things now, prevent yourself from feeling them for ever hereafter? Can you, by lulling yourself asleep, cause your eternal damnation to slumber likewise? Will your wilful inconsideration, think you, quench the flames of hell? Will your stupid forgetfulness of the wrath to come prove any security or protection from it? If not, then what makes you so much in love with your present ease? Nay, if you cannot pretend that it will have any influence of this kind, pray by what charm can you possibly banish the dismal thoughts of an after reckoning? Are you indeed content, and resolved to venture upon hell and

eternal damnation, rather than give yourself the least disturbance in the gratification of your lusts here? Is this indeed the case with you? If it be, then pray tell me,

In the *second* place, Whether you think your present ease and security is preferable to your eternal welfare and happiness? or can you so much as lay the disturbance, which the reflections I am urging you to may occasion, in the balance with these endless and exquisite torments of another world? What! have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge indeed? no right sense or judgement of things? Do you really see no difference between a few moments of uneasiness here, and eternal misery hereafter? If you do not, all that can be said further is only, — O God, open their eyes. But if you can perceive a plain, a prodigious, an inconceivable difference, then why may we not urge you to exchange the one for the other? And what hinders you to comply with so reasonable an exhortation? But,

In the *third* place, What other argument can we insist upon with any prospect of influencing such as you are? What other motive are sensual and secure sinners capable at first of being affected by? Shall we endeavour to reclaim you to your duty by arguments taken from these mighty obligations you lie under to God? This may indeed touch a grateful and ingenuous mind; but is it likely to make any impression on the stupid heart of an unthankful sinner, who is a hater of God, as well as every thing that is good? Shall we think of enticing you to the paths of holiness, by proposing the spiritual joys that attend them to such as neither understand nor relish them? or can we promise any success by displaying the glories of heaven before your eyes? Alas! these objects are too sublime and spiritual for those whose minds are sunk in sense, and enslaved to this world; too pure and refined for such gross affections to aspire to. So that there remains no argument more proper than this, to set before you the torments of hell. These are more easily understood and conceived, and, if seriously believed, carry the most irresistible force to awaken the consciences of the most stupid and hardened wretches: “For who can

“ dwell with devouring fire ? who can dwell with everlasting burnings ? ” as the prophet speaks, Is. xxxiii. 14. This is an argument that touches an essential part of our constitution, the principle of self-preservation, so deeply rooted in our nature, whereby we are strongly prompted to flee from that which we apprehend to be the greatest and most certain evil. So that if this argument does not prevail upon an obdurate sinner, what is it that will ?

And now, my brethren, after you have seriously pondered these considerations, would you still have us tender of disturbing your present ease and thoughtless tranquillity ? or are you still resolved to hug yourselves in this fatal slumber ? If indeed you could still continue to dream on to all eternity, and never were to be awaked out of it, there would be the less to say for disquieting you ; but the case is, you must, and certainly will, be awaked out of it some time ; and whether it is better now or hereafter, is the only question. Hell and damnation are actually before you ; and there is no saving you from them, but by resolving on the uneasiness of such serious and timely reflections as I am recommending to you. Would you refuse to let a surgeon search and probe your wounds for fear of being hurt, though you were in danger of dying if it were not done ? Would you refuse to drink a bitter potion, in order to save your life, because it would be uneasy to you ? Your ghastly wounds, O wilful sinner ! are deep, and therefore must be searched and probed to the quick, if ever you hope to recover. Your life is in imminent danger, and therefore you must drink the bitter potion of these uneasy reflections, if by any means you would be saved.

AND now to conclude this discourse : May I not now hope to prevail with some of you at least, when you go home this evening, to think with yourselves : — I am by nature liable to the dreadful torments of hell. If I continue in this wretched state, it is impossible for me ever either to avoid or to bear them. Oh ! how shall I escape that insupportable wrath of an omnipotent and angry God ! Oh ! what shall I do to be sa-

ved? And if these reflections move you to put this question in earnest, then I can say to you, "Thanks be to God, who has so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth upon him might not perish, but have everlasting life," &c.; John, iii. 16. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved;" Acts, xvi. 31. And that such may be the blessed and happy effect of this day's work upon many of you, may God, of his infinite mercy, grant, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

[Action Sermon.]

S E R M O N I H.

MATTH. xxii. 4.

Again he sent other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner : my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready : come unto the marriage.

MY brethren, there can be nothing more surprising, than that men, who have the affection of self-love so deeply rooted in their natures, that it seems to be the governing principle in most of their actions, and who are made capable likewise of looking forward to the most distant futurity, should at the same time appear to have so little concern about their own happiness or misery in that state which is never to have any end ; and yet all those who reflect upon the state of religion in the world, and the reception which the offer of grace in the gospel meets with, know very well that this is really the case.

Lest the common invitations that are made to sinners in the ordinary preaching of the gospel should not succeed, Christ has instituted this holy ordinance, the sacrament of the Lord's supper, wherein is represented before our eyes, in a most affecting manner, both the danger of continuing in sin, and likewise the effectual remedy that has been provided for us by the dismal and amazing sufferings of himself in our room and stead ; that while our hearts are warmed, and our affections in some measure stirred by the sensible representation of those important things, the kind invitations of the gospel may, at such a season, find so much

the easier access, and make their way with so much the more irresistible force into the very bottom of our souls. And yet, after all, experience is daily convincing us, that the hearts of most men are so deeply entrenched, if I may speak so, among the present objects of a vain and transitory world, and so impregnable are the fortifications wherewith the reigning lusts have got themselves surrounded, that they are able to resist the hottest attacks that can be made upon them by the external means of grace.

However, as it is by these external means of grace that the Spirit of God, which is able to surmount all obstacles, is ordinarily conveyed; so it is necessary constantly to use them, not knowing where or when a blessing may light. And therefore, as I have frequently, upon former occasions, endeavoured to press this offer of salvation in the gospel upon you, (though I am afraid not with such universal success at least as I could wish), so I am once more to make trial of the present occasion, (when the awful solemnity of this ordinance may join its influence with the word), to see if some impenitent sinners can be prevailed upon to flee for refuge, to lay hold upon the hope that is set before them, by the same arguments that may likewise contribute, I hope, to the establishment and confirmation of those who have already been endeavouring to follow so wise a course. And I hope all such among you as have any love for perishing souls, will heartily join with me in praying, that “thou, O Father of mercies, and God of
“all grace, would accompany what may be said upon
“this occasion with the powerful operation of thy Holy
“Spirit, and make it effectual for the conversion of
“sinners, and for promoting the salvation of all here
“present.”

The text which I have now read to you is a sufficient warrant for me to take this office upon me. It contains an express commission from Jesus Christ to his servants to invite and urge the hearers of the gospel to accept of the gracious offer and kind invitation: “Tell them which
“are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my
“oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are
“ready: come unto the marriage.”

It was, you know, the custom of our blessed Saviour, in these admirable discourses wherewith he entertained his hearers during the course of his public ministry upon earth, to represent spiritual matters under the shadow of sensible images, in order to cover himself from the resentment of the priests and the rulers of that time, to which he would have been more exposed, upon many occasions, had he spoken out plainly; and to convey, with more advantage, into the minds of his hearers, suitable notions of divine things, by the similitude of things familiar to them. And here we find him representing gospel- blessings under the notion of a marriage-feast. The preparations for this feast represent the provision that God has made for our salvation and happiness, in the contrivance and execution of the wonderful work of our redemption. By the King's sending his servants to invite the guests, we are to understand the commission given to the ministers of the gospel, to call upon, and earnestly to exhort, all who hear the gospel, to accept of salvation. So that the substance of what is contained in this verse, if it were brought out of its metaphorical dress, would just be to this purpose: "I have commissioned my apostles, " and other ministers of the gospel, to tell the world, " that all the difficulties and obstacles which lay in the " way of their obtaining eternal happiness and salva- " tion are entirely removed; that I have, by my suf- " ferings and obedience in their stead, made a full sa- " tisfaction for all their sins to the offended justice of " God, and purchased a glorious and everlasting happi- " ness; and that therefore they should go and earnestly " invite and urge men to come and accept of this sal- " vation, which I have purchased and procured for " them."

In discoursing to you a little further on these words, I shall endeavour, through grace, in the *first* place, to shew you in what respect *all things are ready* for our salvation. *2dly*, To shew what it is that is required of us in consequence of this readiness of all other things for our salvation; or what is imported in these words, *Come ye to the marriage.* *Lastly*, I shall conclude with

an earnest exhortation to all of you to accept of this kind invitation.

I. I AM to shew you in what respect *all things are ready*, or what are these things that are *ready* for our salvation. But before I mention the particulars, I shall put you in mind, that we are by nature sinners and rebels against God, and consequently liable to eternal damnation; children of disobedience, and consequently children of wrath, as the apostle expresses it, Eph. ii. 3.; and it is this which makes the great preparations necessary in order to bring about our happiness and salvation. Had we never revolted from God, there would have been nothing else necessary to our everlasting happiness, besides a continuance in our primitive integrity. But now we being naturally in a state of rebellion against God, there are many obstacles which may, at first sight, appear insurmountable in the way of our salvation; and that both on God's part and on ours. On God's part, it cannot be expected that he would receive into his bosom such vipers as we have discovered ourselves to be; that he will put up with such affronts as we have offered to him, or bear such a contempt of his most righteous laws, and equitable threatenings, as we have poured upon them, without a sufficient reparation of the honour of that law which has been so rudely violated by us, and a sufficient satisfaction made to his justice, which has been so notoriously offended by us; all which is evidently beyond our power: and then, on the other hand, though God should be supposed willing and ready on his part to receive us into favour again; yet there are no less obstacles on our part; for such is our proneness to that which is evil, and our excessive love to sin, that as we are thereby rendered utterly incapable, so we have as little inclination to those things which are necessary to it, and in the enjoyment of which it consists. Upon these accounts, our salvation has become a work of labour and difficulty; indeed of such labour, and such difficulty, as we ourselves are altogether unequal to. But that which was impossible to ourselves has yet been admirably accomplished by another; insomuch that all

things that are necessary for our salvation are now sufficiently prepared, and fully ready. For,

1st, There is a sufficient ransom already paid for us, and the righteousness of Jesus Christ, our blessed Surety, is ready to be imputed to us. This, as it entirely removes the grand, the chief obstacle in the way of our salvation; so, in order to give us the fullest assurance of it, this is that which is principally designed to be represented and held forth to us in this sacrament of the Lord's supper. Our guilt was that which doomed us to everlasting misery. We had thereby contracted so immense a debt to the justice of God, as neither we ourselves, nor any mere creature, would ever have been able to pay; and as long as this debt continued unpaid, it was impossible that ever we could be happy. But, behold, my brethren, what ample preparation is made for your happiness! The blessed and eternal Son of God becomes surety for the payment of this debt; and, in order to the full discharge of it, was, in the fulness of time, actually "made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons," Gal. iv. 4. 5. Though he was "in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, &c.; yet became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross," Phil. ii. 6. And that no room might be left to doubt of the completeness of the payment, and the hearty acceptance of it likewise, he has already got a most ample discharge by his resurrection from the dead, Acts, ii. 24. "Whom God has raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that he should be holden of it." It was not possible, that, after he had so fully discharged the debt, he should be any longer detained by infinite justice in the room of the debtors; and it is this complete payment of our debt, my brethren, that is represented to us in this sacrament of the Lord's supper. Here we may view the blessed and eternal Son of God wounded for our transgressions, and the Lord laying on him the iniquities of us all. So that, when we look upon this sacred rite, we may be fully assured of the

costly and expensive preparations that are made for our entertainment, and for our eternal happiness and salvation. Can we behold the only begotten and dearly beloved Son of God yielding his back to the smiters, and his face to them that plucked off the hair, thrusting himself between us and his Almighty Father's wrath, and suffering the sword of justice, which was aimed at us, and was about to be bathed in our blood, suffering it rather to be sheathed, as it were, in his own compassionate bowels; can we behold this, and yet entertain any farther doubt of the complete atonement and satisfaction that is made for our crimes? When we behold the severity of his sufferings, how he was not only scourged and crucified by men, but likewise deserted by his own heavenly Father, in those dismal hours of darkness, when he cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" and again, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death;" and again, "Oh! my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me;" can we behold this without the fullest assurance, that justice has no farther demands to make, but that a most ample pardon is thereby procured, and made ready for us? And if this be so, then we may well be assured of the *readiness* of every thing else. For,

2dly, In consequence of this, the Father is *ready* to accept of us. There was nothing else that stood in the way of our acceptance with God but the guilt of our sins. And this being removed, as it has been, you see, in the fullest manner that could have been devised, there is no reason now to doubt of his readiness to accept of all them that are willing to embrace the proposal. Eph. v. 2. "Christ having given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling favour," we may be assured, "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of a sinner," Ezek. xxxiii. 11. And again, Ezek. xviii. 23. "Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God; and not that he should return from his ways and live?" And again, vers. 32. "For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God; wherefore turn your selves, and

“live ye.” Indeed a more astonishing evidence could not have been given of the Father’s readiness to accept us, than his being at such expence for removing out of the way the only impediment that obstructed it. After he has given his own Son to be a propitiation for us, where is there the least room left remaining to doubt of his inclination to receive us into favour again : Rom. viii. 32. “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” John, iii. 16. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life.” And yet,

3dly, It is to be observed, that Christ, our blessed Redeemer, and the dearly-beloved, as well as only-begotten, Son of the Father, is likewise ready to intercede for us; and he has the most powerful and invincible pleas ready, too, upon which to found this his most prevalent and acceptable intercession. As the High Priest under the law, who was a type of him, did first kill the sacrifice, and then carried off the blood of it into the holy place, in virtue whereof to intercede for the people; so Christ has carried with him that body of his, which was dead, and is alive, mangled and bruised as it is on our behalf, and presents it before the Father, as a Lamb that had been slain upon our account; all the gaping wounds whereof are so many open mouths pleading our cause with most efficacious energy. Upon this foundation it is that the apostle raises our security of eternal salvation : Heb. vii. 25. “Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.” Rom. viii. 34. “Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.” But then,

4thly, The Holy Ghost is likewise *ready* to sanctify us. This is one of the glorious fruits of Christ’s purchase. And hence we find the apostle, immediately after having told us of the Son’s being sent, in the fulness of time, to redeem us, adds, Gal. iv. 6. “And because ye are

“ sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of his Son into
 “ your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.” Indeed, without this, all the other preparations that have been made, with so must cost, for our salvation, would have proved altogether ineffectual; like the payment of a prisoner’s debt, who, being sick or lame, was not able, after all, to stir out of his confinement. But our inability to accept of this salvation which Christ has purchased for us, and our indisposition to holiness and happiness, is likewise *ready* to be removed, by the effectual operation of that Holy Spirit in us, which God hath promised to them that ask him : Is. xlv. 3. “ For I will pour water
 “ upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry
 “ ground : I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my
 “ blessing upon thine offspring.” Ezek. xxxvi. 27.
 “ And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you
 “ to walk in my statutes.” We find our Saviour reasoning the matter, to give us the greater assurance of it, Luke, xi. 13. “ If ye then, being evil, know how to
 “ give good gifts unto your children ; how much more
 “ shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to
 “ them that ask him ?” And this Holy Spirit of God is ready, not only to give us the first gracious turn, but likewise to continue with us, and to abide in us, to lead and conduct us through all the difficult steps of our heavenly course, and to land us at length in a state of perfection : John, xiv. 16. “ And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that
 “ he may abide with you for ever.” Hence believers are said to be “ led by the Spirit of God,” Rom. viii. 14. And hence we find the Psalmist, Ps. cxliiii. 10. “ Teach
 “ me to do thy will, for thou art my God : thy
 “ Spirit is good ; lead me into the land of uprightness.”

I might have shewn, if your time had permitted, in several other particular instances, how every thing is *ready* for this great purpose. In a word, immediate peace and comfort is *ready* to be bestowed upon us for our allurements and encouragement. Ordinances are *ready* to edify us ; angels are *ready* to attend us ; and Providence is *ready* to work for us. But as I cannot

pretend to insist upon all these particularly, I shall only add,

In the *last* place, That heaven is *ready* at last to receive us. Christ has not only paid the price of our inheritance, and thereby purchased a glorious and everlasting possession for us in the world to come; but as there is an earnest of it *ready* to be given immediately for our security of receiving the whole in due time, “even the seal of that Holy Spirit of promise which is “the earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption “of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his “glory,” Eph. i. 14.; so he is actually gone to prepare a place for us, and make all things ready for our everlasting glory and happiness, John, xiv. 2. Nay, it was in effect *prepared* for us from the foundation of the world, Matth. xxv. 34.; and the apostle speaks of it as being *prepared*, 1 Cor. ii. 9.; and is said to be kept or reserved for us, and *ready* to be revealed, 1 Pet. i. 4. 5. Nay, for the farther security and greater *readiness* of it, Christ, as our head and representative, has already taken possession of it in our name, and on our behalf, Heb. vi. 20. It is indeed in a great measure concealed from our present view: “Our life is hid “with Christ in God,” Col. iii. 3. But “when Christ “who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear “with him in glory,” vers. 4. And 1 John, iii. 2. “It “doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know, “that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for “we shall see him as he is.”

Thus, my brethren, you see how ready every thing is for your entertainment, and how admirably all things are disposed and prepared for carrying on and completing the salvation of your immortal souls: so that there is a sufficient foundation laid for the gracious invitation in the text for you to *come* and accept of these things.

II. I SHOULD now, in the *second* place, proceed to show what is imported in this invitation, *Come ye to the marriage*, or what it is that is required of us in consequence of this readiness of all other things for our salvation. But as I would fain save some time for enfor-

cing this exhortation upon you, by some arguments or motives, I shall only, for explaining it, very briefly observe to you these few things. Supposing, in the first place, as a foundation of the whole, a firm persuasion of the whole scripture-revelation, this *coming unto the marriage* implies, in the general, a hearty acceptance of the covenant of grace, under which is comprehended these following particulars.

(1.) An earnest solicitude and concern about the eternal salvation of our precious and immortal souls, like that of the jailor when he cried out, "What shall I do to be saved?" Acts, xvi. 30. (2.) A renouncing of all confidence in ourselves, and in any thing that we have done, or can do; desiring, with the apostle, to be "found not having our own righteousness, which is of the law," Phil. iii. 9. (3.) A consent of our wills to be saved through the merit of Jesus Christ, and to owe the pardon of our sins to that meritorious satisfaction which he has made for us; desiring to be "found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith," Phil. iii. 9. (4.) A hearty sorrow for, and a sincere renouncing, abandoning, and forsaking of all known sin, and an unfeigned submission to the laws of Christ, saying, with the Psalmist, "I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments," Ps. cxix. 106. A firm purpose, entered into with the utmost deliberation, that we will prefer the pleasing of God to every other consideration whatever; knowing, that "he who loveth father or mother, son or daughter, more than him, is not worthy of him, and cannot be his disciple," Matth. x. 37. Luke, xiv. 26. These things I might have insisted on at greater length, were it not to save time for that which I principally intended by all this.

III. AND that is, agreeable to the instructions given to all ministers of the gospel by Christ in the text, not only to proclaim this gracious invitation among you, but likewise, as in duty, and from the nature of my of-

fice, I am bound earnestly to press and urge you to accept of it, and, as far as the force of persuasion can go, even *compel you to come in.*

You see, my brethren, the warrant and commission I have for this, from him in whose room I stand here this day, and whose servant in this matter I (how unworthy soever) have the honour to be: "Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage." And to the same purpose, Luke, xiv. 23. "And the Lord said unto the servants, Go out into the highways and hedges, and *compel* them to come in." And says the apostle, 2 Cor. v. 20. "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." So that we are not to look upon this invitation as proceeding only from men like yourselves, but as the immediate voice of the great God, and the call of Jesus Christ, who speaks to you through us who are his instruments and messengers in this great affair.

I have endeavoured already to represent to you how all things are ready and prepared on God's part for your everlasting happiness and salvation, and what abundantly rich provision is made for your entertainment. And now I, being an unworthy servant of the great master of this feast, being sufficiently authorised, you see, and commissioned for this purpose, do, in my master's name, invite all of you, without any exception, to this rich entertainment, which has, at such immense cost and expence, been provided for you; and make a free and a full offer of eternal happiness and salvation, even to the vilest sinner among you, upon the terms that have been mentioned. And, which is more, I do, in his authority, strictly charge and command all who are hearing me just now to accept of it upon your utmost peril. Nay, in compassion to poor heedless perishing wretches, I earnestly beseech and intreat, nay, what do I speak of my intreating? God himself, my brethren, for the love he bears to your souls, and in his great pity and commiseration of your case, condescends, as it were, to beg of and *pray* you, by me, to

be reconciled to him : “ I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God,” and in the bowels of Jesus Christ, I beseech you, by all that just concern which you ought to have for your own precious but perishing souls, by all the happiness of heaven, and by all the torments of hell, and as you would not expose yourselves naked and defenceless to the thundering and overwhelming fury of a provoked and Almighty God, to accept of this kind invitation. Let me, in the words of the evangelical prophet, invite you, “ Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money ; come ye, buy and eat, yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price.”

And, oh ! my brethren, need this exhortation be enforced with any laboured arguments ? or do you indeed want any motives to persuade you to it ? Must you, forsooth, thus be humbly and earnestly intreated to avoid exquisite and eternal misery, and reasoned into a consent to be infinitely and eternally happy ? Would a famishing beggar, at the point of starving for want of food, need any other arguments or intreaties, besides a hearty invitation and assured welcome to a plentiful feast ? Would a condemned criminal, that attended every moment the call of the executioner to the torment of the rack, need to be prayed and begged to accept of a pardon ? or a galley-slave, that was chained to the oar, and just at the fainting under the weight of barbarous oppression, would he stand in need, think you, of the strong reasoning and moving eloquence of the skilful orator, in order to persuade him to lay hold on the occasion of a ransom offered for his liberty ? And yet what are the feeble lashes, what are the severest tortures that can be invented or inflicted by little insignificant wretches like ourselves ? what are the cravings of our present appetites after temporal food, in comparison with the insupportable and everlasting punishment of the damned in hell ? And what is any degree of temporal liberty, what is the favour of an earthly monarch, or what are the richest entertainments of sense in this world, in comparison with the favour of God, and the glorious and eternal happiness of heaven ?

Indeed there cannot be a more amazing evidence of the folly and simplicity, the blindness and stupidity of sinners, than the great difficulty there is in convincing them of their true interest, and that there is any necessity of urging and pressing them so importunately to fly from infinite misery, and embrace everlasting happiness. But if arguments would do the business, you might soon be *compelled* to come in. However, let me intreat a little of your patience and attention, while I reason the matter a little with you. And here I might insist upon the future happiness on the one hand, and the misery on the other hand; but I shall only mention the few following considerations.

1st, And therefore consider even the *present* misery of your state, as long as you withhold your consent to this offer. How easy soever you may feel yourselves, yet it is impossible to conceive any thing so dismal as the state of an impenitent sinner. He is a slave to the devil, who is every day making new ravages upon the soul, and to his own lusts, which domineer over him with the most merciless tyranny, as long as he continues in that state. He is liable to the insupportable wrath of an Almighty being, who is angry with the wicked every day. Every moment of his life that he continues in impenitence, he runs the most dreadful risk that can be imagined: for death may surprise him in a thousand different ways; and then down he must, of necessity, sink into an endless and irrecoverable state of insupportable misery. And now, what do you think of living unconcernedly in such a state as this? There is nothing in the world, besides such a conduct itself, that can give us a notion of the madness of it. To sleep upon the top of a mast rocking with the billows, or to walk blindfold upon the edge of a precipice, are, modestly speaking, instances of prudence in comparison with this. To see men, who are in danger every moment of falling into torments that are exquisite in degree, and eternal in duration, which, when once fallen into, there is no getting out of for ever; to see them live as unconcernedly, sleep as soundly, and laugh as heartily, as if they were in the utmost security, is really such a melancholy and shocking instance of stupidity, that,

if custom had not rendered it familiar to us, it would certainly be, of all things in the world, the most amazing.

2dly, And then consider the easiness of the terms upon which salvation is offered to you. Had God required some great or difficult thing of you, in order to recover his favour; had he required you to lie for millions of ages under severe torment before he would be reconciled to you; nay, had he but required you, for the short space of this transitory life, to renounce all the comfortable enjoyments of it, and expose yourself to all the miseries and calamities of it, or even to undergo such penances and mortifications as many in the church of Rome voluntarily impose upon themselves; you might have had some shadow at least of excuse, though, even in the worst of these cases, it had been egregious folly to refuse compliance. But when we consider, that he requires nothing of us but what would, upon its own account, and without any other reward, have been our wisest choice, nothing but what in its own nature is really calculated for promoting our own happiness, in this world too as well as in the other; when we consider, that godliness hath the promises of the life which now is, as well as of the life to come; that his yoke is easy, and his burden light; that all his commands concerning all things are infinitely right; what have we to alledge, in the least extenuation of our folly, if we refuse to comply with so fair an offer?

3dly, Consider that this is the express command of the Most High God, the Sovereign Lord of the universe, which, one would think, should be motive enough to us, who are the creatures of his power, and the workmanship of his hand; who live, and move, and have our being, in, and our dependence upon him, even although the least reason of such a command did not appear unto us. I might shew you this command in a great many places of his word. But is not my text a most positive and express command to this purpose: "Come ye to the marriage." And the Apostle John tells us plainly, 1 John, iii. 23. "And this is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, as he gave us commandment." And art thou, O man! O woman! art thou, he or she,

that darest take upon thee to dispute the express command of the great God, whose infinite wisdom does certainly render him the properest judge of what is fit to be done, and whose irresistible power (let me tell you likewise) is abundantly sufficient, some how or other, to support the honour of those laws which he thinks proper to prescribe.

4thly, But then consider how deeply this matter seems to be laid to heart by God and our blessed Redeemer. I do not mention this only to terrify you, by insinuating how severely God must be supposed to resent the neglect of a duty that he himself has so deeply at heart; but I mention it chiefly to give you lively impressions of its importance. Though you yourselves may be unconcerned and indifferent, yet will it not rouse and alarm you a little to see what extraordinary solicitude is expressed in this matter by God and by Jesus Christ. Will not this convince you, that there is somewhat more in it than you perhaps may be apt to apprehend? It would be endless to enumerate the various and surprising expressions of this that are to be met with in scripture. What would you think to hear of God's rising early to set about or prosecute any business? And yet how often do we hear in the Old Testament, not only of God's sending his servants the prophets to warn sinners, but his "rising early, and sending them;" not only of his protesting against their wicked courses, but his "rising early and protesting, saying, Oh!" (one would think they heard his groans, and beheld the concern he was in) "Oh! do not this abominable thing that I hate." Sometimes we find him swearing to them, "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of a sinner. Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?" What a mournful sound of those words of our compassionate Redeemer, and what a wonderful solicitude and concern appears in them? John, v. 40. "And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life." And again, says he, "How often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not." View but that pathetic and affectionate scene which is represented in Luke, xix. 41. He beheld the city, and wept

over it, &c. Behold, my brethren, the stupid and obstinate impenitence of sinners, how little soever it is apt to affect ourselves, drawing tears from him who is the Son of God. He that was able to bear the united punishment of a world of sinners, without uttering any complaint, till tears of blood were squeezed from every pore of his body, could not, however, stand the inconceivable folly of perishing souls, without shedding tears, and groaning out his complaints in the most lamentable tone, while he looked round about upon them with anger, "being grieved for the hardness of their hearts." But why need I mention particulars, when the grand instance of his leaving the throne of glory, and exposing himself to those dreadful sufferings, and that amazing death, which we are now about to commemorate, is an evidence equal to a thousand demonstrations of the wonderful solicitude he feels for our salvation? And now, O sinner, is all this unable to make the least impression upon thee! Canst thou behold the Son of God, weeping at the prospect of that misery on which thou art heedlessly rushing, protesting and complaining of it in the most pathetic manner, yea, bleeding and dying to deliver thee from it, canst thou behold all this without the least emotion?

5thly, Consider the argument in the text, that "all things are ready;" that pardon is purchased, and heaven prepared for you; that God is willing to receive you, and waits with open arms to embrace you; in a word, that there is not an obstacle or impediment remaining in the way of your salvation, but the want of your own consent. And will you continue in slavery after your ransom is paid? Will you suffer the sentence to be executed after a pardon is procured? Shall Christ come from heaven to earth, shall he be scourged and buffeted, shall he be exposed to bleed and die upon a cross, and shall all this be for nothing with regard to you? Ah! my brethren, consider what some other sinners would give to be in the same situation? What would the devils, and the damned in hell, who are bound in everlasting chains, and roar under the dreadful pangs of present, and the insupportable apprehensions of eternal torments, what think you would they

give to hear proclamation made, that all things are ready for their deliverance? What a pleasing pause would be made amid the horrid noise of their wailing, and the jarring sound of their gnashing teeth, that they might listen to the joyful tidings? What a sudden brightness would dart through these gloomy regions, and make the transported inhabitants forget the dreary horrors of the place? O ye departed spirits! O ye tortured souls! could ye but relate with what ravenous ardour ye would snatch at such an offer, how would this reproach the coldness and indifference with which it is received by us? But, alas! if we hear not Moses and the prophets, Christ, and his apostles, neither will we be persuaded though one rose from the dead.

In the *last* place, Consider that the time is coming when, if you do not embrace this proposal, it will no more be in your offer; and then you will begin to load yourselves with the bitterest reproaches; then you will begin to cry, "Fool and madman that I have been, to let slip so precious an opportunity." Read but that alarming passage of scripture, Prov. i. 24. "Because I have called and ye refused, and no man regarded, but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me; for that they hated knowledge, and did not chuse the fear of the Lord." Read likewise that pathetic and mournful lamentation of our Saviour over Jerusalem, Luke, xix. 42. "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes."

And now, my brethren, what say you to all this? Can ye pretend any reasonable objection against embracing this offer? I know you cannot. It is impossible. And yet I know likewise, that it would be one of the most extraordinary things that ever happened, if there were not some among you who will, after all, refuse to

comply with this reasonable proposal, and reject this kind invitation. Our Saviour has expressly forewarned us of this in the very following verse. "But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise. For many," says he, "are called, but few are chosen." And when he himself was sitting with his own twelve disciples, (one of the purest companies, I dare say, that ever heard the gospel), yet he could tell them, that one of them should betray him. And if the case be so, are ye not beginning to say within yourselves, as the disciples did upon that occasion, "Lord, is it I? Lord, is it I?" What if I should be one of those unhappy wretches, who, against all the reasons, against all the interest, against all the authority, in a word, against all the obligations, that are most sacred and binding, will yet make light of this invitation, and go away rather to my farm or my merchandise, to the gratifying and indulging of my corrupt lusts and unruly passions?

Why, indeed, my friends, if there be any of you that behave in this manner, it is melancholy to think of it, and so much the more, because your being here this day will exceedingly aggravate your sin, and consequently contribute to increase your misery. For my own part, I cannot think without some degree of horror, that I have been all this while heaping coals of fire upon the heads of some of my hearers, and blowing up the devouring flames of hell for them, into a greater and fiercer heat. Do not think, that if you neglect this invitation, and can make a shift to get without the reach of its sound, while your consciences are laid asleep, that you are never to hear more of it. Remember, my friends, that every offer of mercy, every call that sounds in your ears, is distinctly marked and recorded by God, and an exact account preserved of their success. Now, when the books shall be opened, and your own consciences must needs attest the record of this day among others, think how confounded you will appear when it shall be asked, "Was not you, upon such a day, and at such a place, and upon such a solemn occasion, earnestly invited, and importunately urged, to accept of the kind entertainment which was with amazing

"expenſe prepared for you? Were you not fairly
 "warned of your danger, in caſe you ſhould preſume
 "to make light of it? Nay, how much farther may the
 "charge be carried? and how many inſtances may
 "you be put in mind of, in which you have been
 "warned and urged, both publicly and privately, in
 "the church, and in the family; nay, many of you
 "perſonally and particularly? Think not that ye ſhall
 "then ſtand upon the ſame footing with thoſe who ne-
 "ver heard the joyful ſound, and who never had grace
 "or mercy in their offer, but from the obſcure lan-
 "guage of the works of creation and providence. For
 "it ſhall be more tolerable in the day of judgement for
 "Sodom and Gomorrah, and for Tyre and Sidon,
 "than for you, to whom God has ſtretched out his
 "hands, and given a moſt earneſt and preſſing invita-
 "tion, without your paying it the leaſt regard." And
 now, if there be any in this aſſembly who, at the great
 day, ſhall be found on the left hand of the Judge, I ap-
 peal to you all, whether you will not then have this cir-
 cumſtance to aggravate your condemnation, and to in-
 crease your confuſion. I call heaven and earth to re-
 cord, that eternal ſalvation is this day in your offer. If
 you will not accept of it, your blood be upon your own
 heads. I take all of you witneſſes againſt one another,
 nay, ye are witneſſes againſt yourſelves this day. Behold
 the Redeemer ſtanding at the door of your hearts, and
 knocking unweariedly, waiting with patience, and after
 repeated repulſes, giving repeated calls. And will not
 every call he makes at the door of your hearts now
 bring ſo many redoubled ſtrokes of vengeance upon you
 hereafter, if he is obliged at length to depart without
 procuring admittance?

But, oh! my brethren, may I not by this time turn
 my thoughts from the melancholy proſpect, which the
 too notorious and experienced obſtinacy of impenitent
 finners forces into view upon ſuch an occaſion, and
 which otherwiſe I ſhould be loath to entertain you with?
 May I not hope that ſome at leaſt among you, having
 liſtened to theſe calls that have this day been made at
 the doors of your hearts, are now answering theſe calls,
 opening to Chriſt, and receiving him, that he may

come in and sup with you, and cause you to sup with him? May I not hope that there is some one at least among all this multitude? If there be but one sinner converted here to-day, our Saviour assures us, that it will give joy to God himself, and spread a holy gladness through the regions above. Behold! my brethren, what a cloud of witnesses you are compassed about with, that are not only attentive, but interested spectators of your conduct this day? Heaven on the one hand, and hell on the other, waiting the issue of this day's call and invitation, and looking on with anxiety to see whether the offer which has been made to you shall be accepted, or whether it shall be rejected. Will you afford occasion for a fullen and malicious triumph through the grim shades of infernal darkness? or will you not rather chuse to give joy in the presence of the holy angels, and particularly to that best friend of yours, who has, in the most gracious manner, declared, that the day of his espousals with you is the day of the gladness of his heart? Oh! my brethren, may not I, for my own part, indulge the pleasing thought, that I shall have some of this assembly to be a glory and crown of rejoicing to me in that day when God maketh up his jewels?

And now, to conclude the whole, if exquisite and everlasting happiness be indeed a thing of such absolute indifference that it is not worth the obtaining; if exquisite and everlasting misery is a trifle that we need not be solicitous to avoid; if the express command of God does not deserve to be minded; if his highest displeasure is not to be in the least regarded; or if the yielding up of his own Son to dreadful sufferings and a cruel death, be an event so unimportant, that it is of no consequence whether it turn to any account or not; and if all the costly and expensive preparations that God has been pleased to make for our everlasting salvation, do not lay the least obligation upon us, then we may still continue to reject and contemn such calls and invitations as have been made this day. But if, on the other hand, glory, honour, and immortality, be really worth the seeking; if the wrath to come be worth the shunning; if the express command of God can be supposed to lay any obligation upon his own creatures; if his dis-

pleasure has really any thing dreadful in it; if the death and sufferings of the Son of God be an event that merits the most important regard by those on whose account they were endured; and if the making all things ready for our salvation, at the most immense and amazing cost, may be thought to deserve our gratitude; then let me intreat you to comply with this exhortation. And may God himself accompany what has been said with his grace and spirit.

come in and sup with you, and cause you to sup with him? May I not hope that there is some one at least among all this multitude? If there be but one sinner converted here to-day, our Saviour assures us, that it will give joy to God himself, and spread a holy gladness through the regions above. Behold! my brethren, what a cloud of witnesses you are compassed about with, that are not only attentive, but interested spectators of your conduct this day? Heaven on the one hand, and hell on the other, waiting the issue of this day's call and invitation, and looking on with anxiety to see whether the offer which has been made to you shall be accepted, or whether it shall be rejected. Will you afford occasion for a fullen and malicious triumph through the grim shades of infernal darkness? or will you not rather chuse to give joy in the presence of the holy angels, and particularly to that best friend of yours, who has, in the most gracious manner, declared, that the day of his espousals with you is the day of the gladness of his heart? Oh! my brethren, may not I, for my own part, indulge the pleasing thought, that I shall have some of this assembly to be a glory and crown of rejoicing to me in that day when God maketh up his jewels?

And now, to conclude the whole, if exquisite and everlasting happiness be indeed a thing of such absolute indifference that it is not worth the obtaining; if exquisite and everlasting misery is a trifle that we need not be solicitous to avoid; if the express command of God does not deserve to be minded; if his highest displeasure is not to be in the least regarded; or if the yielding up of his own Son to dreadful sufferings and a cruel death, be an event so unimportant, that it is of no consequence whether it turn to any account or not; and if all the costly and expensive preparations that God has been pleased to make for our everlasting salvation, do not lay the least obligation upon us, then we may still continue to reject and contemn such calls and invitations as have been made this day. But if, on the other hand, glory, honour, and immortality, be really worth the seeking; if the wrath to come be worth the shunning; if the express command of God can be supposed to lay any obligation upon his own creatures; if his dis-

pleasure has really any thing dreadful in it; if the death and sufferings of the Son of God be an event that merits the most important regard by those on whose account they were endured; and if the making all things ready for our salvation, at the most immense and amazing cost, may be thought to deserve our gratitude; then let me intreat you to comply with this exhortation. And may God himself accompany what has been said with his grace and spirit.

S E R M O N IV.

2 COR. v. 20.

Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us : we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.

MY brethren, the sacrament of the Lord's supper is not an initiating, but rather a confirming ordinance, and not so much designed for the conversion of sinners, as for the edification of believers ; and therefore what you are to hear upon this occasion might, for that reason, be expected to be peculiarly applicable to those who are already reconciled to God. And, oh ! that all the communicants within these doors were really of that character. Would to God that your lives and actions did so evidently and so plainly declare the sincerity of your religion, that there was no occasion for speaking to you at this time upon a different supposition, and that what I am to offer you might appear to be in a great measure foreign to the purpose ! Indeed I am in hopes, that there are some present who not only *profess* to be, but *really* are, the true disciples of Jesus Christ ; and I doubt not but there are a great many others, who have already made such steps towards that state as are not at all to be despised, and perhaps are within a very little of being *reconciled to God*.

About such a time as this, many good resolutions are apt to be formed, which possibly want but to be pushed a little farther, and rendered somewhat more firm and steady, in order to complete the work of their conversion and reconciliation to God. But is it not, at the same

time, too evident to be either denied or dissembled, that there are numbers, even among such as venture to approach the table of the Lord, who are not yet in a state of reconciliation with God, and some (as it is too justly to be feared) who are yet at a great distance from such a state? As long as it is in the hands of fallible men to admit to, or exclude from, this ordinance, we cannot think of a safer rule to go by, than to refuse admittance to none who apply for it, if they be not either grossly ignorant, or scandalous in their practice. But is this sufficient, in order to be admitted into favour and friendship with God? If the character of truly good men that is given us in the scripture be justly drawn; if it be indeed true, that whosoever is born of God, doth not commit sin, his seed remaining in him, so that he cannot sin, because he is born of God; if it is in this that the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil, whosoever doth not righteousness, is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother; in a word, if all those who wilfully indulge themselves in the habitual practice of any known sin, whatever their professions and attainments may otherwise be, and how near soever they may be to a state of grace, are, nevertheless, still in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity, and consequently in a state of enmity against God; how many are the instances of characters in the scripture, like Agrippa, who was *almost*, but not *altogether*, a Christian; and like the amiable young man in the gospel, whom Jesus, *beholding him, loved*; but *one thing*, says he, *thou lackest*; and yet thou art not far from, but not *in* the kingdom of God. Ah! my brethren, if this be really the case, as it most certainly is, ah! how many are there who may be admitted by men to the table of the Lord, whom yet we have but too much reason to address in the words of my text: "We pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled *unto God.*"

It would, I assure you, be a much greater pleasure to me to suppose the case to be otherwise, and to speak to you, especially upon such an occasion as this, in the character of true disciples of Christ. But I must take people as they *are*, not as they *ought* to be. Now, the

case standing as has been represented above, I know not, either of a properer subject for this occasion, or a properer occasion for this subject. I call it a proper subject for the present occasion; because, if I may possibly be made instrumental in driving on some good resolutions that may be already more than half formed perhaps, till they come to be sufficiently firm and in earnest, and so the work of reconciliation with God be completed, and receive, as it were, the finishing stroke; nothing, I dare say, can contribute more to a worthy and profitable partaking of this holy ordinance. And I call this a proper occasion for such a subject; because I cannot help entertaining some hopes, that the very awfulness and solemnity of the occasion may contribute somewhat to the success of my endeavours; and that even those who have given a deaf ear to the calls of the gospel upon more ordinary occasions, may now, that their hearts are somewhat warmed, and their affections, I would hope, somewhat moved, even by what is externally striking in the solemn work of this day, be so much the easier wrought upon. And, to use a proverbial expression, I would fain strike while the iron is hot. And, oh! may what is to be said prove like “goads and nails fastened by the masters of assemblies.” And for this purpose, may he who is the master of assemblies, and who alone has the keys of mens hearts, open your ears, and prepare your hearts to receive, as well as determine your wills to comply with a message from himself, represented, as it is in my text, with such circumstances of awfulness, tenderness, and importance, as may well bespeak your most earnest attention: “Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, “as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you “in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.”

My chief design in reading this text to you being to enforce and urge upon you that earnest exhortation and intreaty which it contains, I shall, in order to save your time, omit what might be said by way of explanation of the text, or doctrinal instruction, and come directly to the main thing I have in my view, when I shall have just observed to you, in so many words,

1st, That although the great author of existence may justly be supposed to regard all his rational and sensible creatures as they came from his hands, in their primitive and original state, with the kindest and most benevolent affections, so that, in such a case, there would be no necessity of being reconciled to him; yet it is a notorious fact, which is as sensibly and severely felt by woful experience, as it is expressly attested by the plainest declarations of holy writ, that man has thrown himself out of the divine favour, and exposed himself to the dreadful vengeance of his Almighty Maker and Judge, by the most inexcusable and atrocious rebellion. How little soever this may be thought upon, and laid to heart, yet that it is the case with us all by nature, might easily be proved, and will not, I presume, be called in question: "Wherefore," says the apostle, "as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned," Rom. v. 12. My *second* observation is,

2^{dly}, That as it would have been impossible for us ever to have expiated that guilt which we had contracted, or to have recovered the favour of God which we had lost, by any satisfaction that we could make to his offended justice, it has pleased God to find out, and put in execution, a most admirable contrivance, whereby the most implacable enemies to him, and the most atrocious rebels among us, may be reconciled to him, not only without any injury, but with the greatest glory to his holiness, justice, and all his other perfections. This is by that meritorious sacrifice of his own Son in our room and stead, which we are called this day to commemorate.

3^{dly}, The *last* thing that I shall observe to you, by way of preliminary, is, that all that is required on our part, in order to make up this reconciliation, is, not that we should submit to any exquisite sufferings, or apply ourselves to any thing that is exceeding hard and unreasonable, but only this easy and reasonable condition, That, forsaking our rebellion against him, we should accept of the gracious offer he makes us of salvation and happiness: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever

“ believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life,” John, iii. 16. And though it is easy to see that all the advantage in this matter is ours; yet it is this which we find so much difficulty in persuading sinners to comply with, and to which there is so earnest and pressing an exhortation in my text, which I now proceed to consider and enforce: “ Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.”

Every word almost in this text has the weight of a thousand arguments. Let me then join issue with the design of Christ and his apostle in it, and press a little upon you this earnest intreaty. (1.) From the consideration of the person whose message and intreaty it is; and that is God himself, and his blessed Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ: We are ambassadors *for Christ*, God does beseech you by us in *Christ’s stead*. (2.) From the consideration of the manner and form of this message, and the way in which this intreaty is made to us. It is in the most moving and pathetic, the most tender and affectionate manner, no less than *beseeching* and *praying* from God and Christ. (3.) From the consideration of the subject of this message, and the advantage of complying with it: it is to be *reconciled to God*.

I. IN order to impress your minds with a due sense of the infinite importance of that message I bear to you this day, remember, my friends, whose message it is. I come not here to-day in my own name, or on my own errand. If I did so, it were no great matter if you neglected and disregarded what I say. But if ye refuse to hear him that speaks on earth, have a care how you refuse to hear him that speaketh from heaven. He whose express commission I bear to you, and in whose place I now stand, is no less a being than the great God, and particularly his Son Jesus Christ, our blessed Saviour. This is what the apostle insists much upon, and repeats over and over in the text: “ We are ambassadors for Christ: God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead.” As it is this which gives importance and weight to the message, it will be of con-

sequence to consider it a little more particularly; and in doing so, I shall, in a great measure, confine myself to the consideration of *Christ* as the person immediately concerned in this message, as he is oftener than once mentioned in the text, and to whom the same things are applicable that might be said, upon this occasion, of God the Father, as well as some additional ones likewise, Matth. xxi. 37. "But last of all he sent unto them his "Son, saying, They will reverence my Son."

Now, a message from him upon the subject of our reconciliation with God will appear to be of the greatest weight, (1.) Because he is our absolute sovereign, to all whose orders we are bound to pay the deepest regard, and who is particularly commissioned by the Father to bring about this reconciliation. (2.) Because there is none to whose sense of this matter there is a greater deference to be paid, not only as he is endued with infinite knowledge and wisdom, but particularly as he himself has felt, in his own experience, both what it is to have, and what it is to want the favour of God. (3.) Because he is one to whom we lie under the greatest and strongest obligations. And, (4.) Because it is he who will at last be our judge upon this very point.

Ist, Consider that he who sent me to you upon this message of reconciliation, is your absolute sovereign, who made you, and preserves you, and whose very property you are: "For God hath in these last days spoken unto us particularly by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds," Heb. i. 2. So that if you disobey this message, coming thus from him, to all whose orders you are bound to pay the deepest regard, you thereby do not only reject the most advantageous proposal that could be made to you, and slight the fairest opportunity of recovering what you have lost already, but do likewise incur the farther guilt of new, direct acts of rebellion, Heb. ii. 3. and x. 28 29. and xii. 25. Besides, he is one whose power may safely be depended upon in a matter of this importance, being sufficiently authorised to transact the affair of man's reconciliation with God: "All things," says he, "are delivered to me of my Father," Matth. xi. 27.; and therefore he adds,

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vers. 28. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Suppose a parcel of weak unthinking people, engaged, without any just ground, in actual rebellion against a most gracious and powerful king, whose arms they were in no sort of condition to withstand; if any wise and knowing person should, even of his own head, advise them, as a friend only, to lay down their arms, and implore their prince's pardon and favour, as the prudentest step that was now left them to take, even in that case, to be sure, what he said would deserve some regard. But if, besides the reasonableness of what he proposed, he should likewise produce an express commission from the king, or his son, to whom this whole affair had been entirely committed, empowering him to offer them, in his name, a full and universal pardon for all their enormous offences; nay, proposing to them farther, upon their submission, to be taken into particular favour and friendship with him, and to be most remarkable sharers in the royal bounty; would not this, think you, give a prodigious additional weight to his advice, and render his proposal, fit as it would even otherwise be, a matter now of much greater importance, and vastly more worthy of their serious deliberation?

And is not this precisely the case before us? As you are all of you, by nature, rebels against your Maker, and out of favour with the supreme being, if I should, without knowing of any revelation or commission from him to this purpose, advise you to do your best in order to recover his favour, and be reconciled to him, I am sure such a counsel would not be rejected, without the most amazing folly. But when I show you an express commission from Jesus Christ, warranting, empowering, and requiring me, to make this proposal to you, what name shall we find for the person that dares adventure to despise it? The folly of such a conduct will farther appear, if we consider,

2dly, That he who thus prays and beseeches you to be reconciled to God, is one who must needs be acknowledged to be the best judge of what is fit to be done in such a case, not only as he is endued with that infinite

wisdom which qualifies him to give the best directions in every case, but particularly in the affair of reconciliation with God, as he himself has in the highest degree had the experience, both of what the favour of God is, and what the want of it is. In the case formerly supposed, of a parcel of wretched rebels, if the person who urged the proposal of submission upon them were famed for his wisdom and prudence, and could not possibly be liable to the suspicion of labouring under the least mistake or misapprehension of any one circumstance in the whole matter, would not this contribute exceedingly to add a considerable weight to his words, especially if he himself, having been formerly in rebellion against the same prince, had occasion by turns to feel both the weight of his displeasure, and advantage of his favour?

But what inconceivable folly must it be to reject the proposal of one whose wisdom is so infinitely perfect, that it is impossible for him ever to commit the smallest error in judgement? Well may he know particularly the value of souls, who not only made them, and endued them with all their powers, and all their capacities, but likewise had the price to pay for the purchase of them. And sure I am, none can be better acquainted with, or speak with more experimental knowledge, both about the favour and the displeasure of God. With what propriety may he recommend to us reconciliation with God, and what credit must needs be due to all that he declares, of the advantage there is in the divine favour, who is the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, who from eternity was "by him as one brought up with him, who was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him;" in a word, who is his "beloved Son, in whom he is well pleased." But has he therefore, think you, only an acquaintance with the favour of God by the experience of what the enjoyment of it is, though he never was, in his own person, guilty of the least offence against God? yet it "pleased the Lord to bruise him, he hath put him to grief," Is. liii. 10. For, as it is in the verse following my text, "he hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteous-

“ nefs of God in him.” What a sad experience had he likewise of the wrath of God, who by it was thrown into such agony in the garden of Gethsemany, as made him sweat as it were great drops of blood, and obliged him to cry out, “ My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death ? ” and again, when hanging upon the cross, with the weight of all our guilt upon him, and “ bearing our sins on his own body on the tree, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me ? ” This, my brethren, is the person that prays and beseeches you to be reconciled unto God ; and, after all, can you think that his intreaties upon this subject deserve no manner of regard ?

3dly, Consider that he who thus prays and intreats you to be reconciled to God, is the best and most affectionate friend you ever had, and has done so much for you, as lays you under the highest and strongest obligations to him. In this case, one would think it might have a double influence upon you as to the matter in hand, both as you become thereby bound in the strongest ties of gratitude to comply with every reasonable demand that he condescends to urge upon you, and as it likewise gives you the greatest security, that he will press upon you nothing that is for your disadvantage.

Do you stand in need, my friends, to be put in mind, upon such a day as this, when you have so near a prospect of commemorating his death, of the mighty things that your blessed Redeemer has done for you, when the symbols of that body of his which was broken for you, and that blood whereof he spilt the last precious drop on your behalf, are to be seen before your eyes upon a communion-table ? Take but a view of these, and think what obligations you are under to him whose earnest intreaties meet with such a cold reception. Did he not run into the midst of the thickest and fiercest flames of God’s wrath, that he might snatch you as brands out of that devouring fire ? When the formidable sword of divine justice was drawn forth, and pointed at you, did he not, to prevent its being bathed in your blood, receive it himself, and suffer it to be sheathed in his own compassionate bowels ? Ah ! my brethren, had it not been for the great love wherewith he has loved

you, and the amazing things he has done for you, you might have been, by this time, roaring in chains of eternal darkness, wailing, and gnashing your teeth among the devils and despairing spirits that inhabit the infernal regions? What a tender affection must he entertain for you, who has himself become one of you, and laid aside the glorious robes of his divine nature, to be clothed with the vile rags of human flesh? And being found in fashion as a man, did he not procure heaven and eternal happiness for you, become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross? Did he not stand up, in your room, as the mark at which that omnipotent vengeance was aimed which you had drawn upon your own guilty heads? The terrors of God did set themselves in array against him, and the arrows of the Almighty were within him, the poison whereof drank up his very spirit: and was not all this in order to cover you from that irresistible storm of Almighty wrath, which you would never have been able either to avoid or to endure, in order to procure you the ravishing smiles of his Father's pleased countenance, to purchase for you a blessed and everlasting rest, and, in a word, to crown you with his loving kindness and tender mercy: "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich," 2 Cor. viii. 9.

And is this, my brethren, is this the person that is suffered to stand at the door of your hearts, which are kept impenetrably barred and shut against the repeated, unwearied, and importunate knocks, that he continues, after many rude and obstinate repulses, most patiently still to give them? Is this the person that we find, in my text, condescending earnestly to *pray* you, and *beseech* you, and without success too? And after all, pray what is it that he is thus suffered so unsuccessfully to pray and beseech you to do? Is it any thing that is calculated merely for promoting his own interest, or that will cost you some diminution of your own happiness? Suppose it were, is it consistent with the smallest remains of gratitude or ingenuity, to suffer one who has laboured with such indefatigable and unexam-

pled assiduity to promote your happiness, and prevent your misery, to suffer him earnestly and unsuccessfully to solicit even a favour for himself? One would be apt to think, that if there was the least spark of gratitude among men, he who has done so much for us, and whose broken body and shed blood are so frequently pleading his cause before our eyes, he to whose generosity we owe our escape from insupportable anguish, one would think, that he might successfully make any demand; and that, on naming the greatest favour in our power to bestow, it would be granted as soon as asked. I am confident, that every person who possessed any generous sentiments, would reckon himself happy in, and thank any one that should help him to, the discovery of an opportunity of obliging so great a benefactor, and making some return for that inconceivable kindness for which he stands indebted to him.

But after all, what shall we think of the matter, if the favour he thus condescends to solicit from us, with so much importunity, be a favour to ourselves? what if it be only begging of us to abandon the paths that lead to our own exquisite and eternal misery, and to suffer him to conduct us to the most exquisite and eternal happiness? if it be only beseeching us to be reconciled unto God? This, I shall readily grant, would indeed be doing him a favour likewise. But upon what account, think you, would it be a favour to him? Is it that our goodness extendeth to him, as much as it may do to the saints, and the excellent ones in the earth? "Can a man be profitable unto him, as he that is wise may be profitable unto himself? Is it any pleasure unto the Almighty that thou art righteous? or is it gain to him that thou makest thy ways perfect?" Job, xxii. 2. 3. "If thou sinnest, what dost thou against him? or if thy transgressions be multiplied, what dost thou unto him? If thou be righteous, what givest thou him? or what receiveth he of thine hand? Thy wickedness may hurt a man as thou art, and thy righteousness may profit the son of man," Job, xxv. 6. 7. 8. How comes it then to be such a favour to him, that we should comply with a request of this nature? Why, his love to us is so ar-

dent, and so tender, that the greatest pleasure we are capable of doing to him, is to consult our own interest, and promote our own happiness. For there is joy in heaven, there is a peculiar pleasure in his divine and benevolent breast, over every sinner that repenteth, Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

And indeed the wonderful things that he has done for us are such a sufficient evidence of the tenderness of his love, as puts it beyond all question, that he would demand nothing of us that could tend to our prejudice. In the case formerly mentioned, of a messenger sent to a wretched handful of desperate rebels, how wise and prudent soever he might be who urged them to submit, yet if, at the same time, he was their declared enemy, this might possibly afford them a handle to distrust his advice; but if, on the other hand, he had appeared all along to be the dearest and best friend that ever they had known, if he had actually hazarded his own life to preserve theirs, and had spent his whole substance for the purchase of their liberty, if he was nearly related to them, and the very person who, by his power and interest, his doings and sufferings, had prevented their immediate execution, and the ruin of all that belonged to them; if he was one who had thus endeared himself to them, and whose kindness for them was so far beyond all question; what reason could be pretended for distrusting his counsel, or rejecting his proposal? especially if the refusal of compliance on their part did at once entirely disconcert the favourite project of his life, (and therefore the favourite one because it was necessary for their happiness), and render all the pains he had been at, and all the loss he had suffered on their account, ineffectual and unavailing.

And yet, my brethren, the case being put in this manner, it will be found to fall infinitely short of the wrong and injustice, not to say ingratitude, that impenitent sinners are guilty of towards Jesus Christ. Is not the salvation and recovery of your souls the favourite project that appears to lie nearest his heart? To accomplish this, has not he who was infinitely rich, for your sakes become poor, that ye through his poverty might be made rich? And now, when every thing else is

done, at the most amazing cost and expence on his part, that is necessary to your reconciliation with God, and the matter is brought to this point, that nothing is wanting but your own consent, he, knowing the surprising folly and stupid insensibility of sinners, with regard to their most important interests, applies to you, in the most tender and affectionate, the most earnest and importunate manner, condescending even to beseech you, as if it were his own advantage, not yours, he was promoting; and can you, after all this, find in your hearts to give him such a grievous disappointment, as to reject his proposal, and render all he has done and suffered for you ineffectual, at least as to your parts? I ask now, If you yourselves are able to conceive, when you are pleased to bestow a cool reflection upon the matter, a more unjustifiable and disingenuous conduct? But, my brethren, if there are any among you capable of persisting in such measures, let me advise you to consider what I have to add, in the

Fourth and last place, That he who now prays and beseeches you is the same that will at last be your judge. Let not the unusual condescension of our blessed Redeemer so far impose upon your understandings, as to imagine, that he will always continue in this tender strain of praying and beseeching. He who now condescends to apply to you with earnest and importunate intreaties, and begs it of you as a favour, that you would be reconciled to God, will, ere it be long, summon you before that awful and tremendous tribunal, the judgement-seat of that same Christ whose intreaties you now make so light of; and will you adventure, will any of you take it upon you, to treat with contempt the solicitations of him who is then to sit upon that glorious and awful throne, before which your trembling will not hinder you to be dragged, and where you are to be judged for the usage his calls and invitations have met with here? Do not imagine, that when he condescends now to make the kindest proposals, and urges you to comply with them, in the most importunate manner, that, in case you think fit to reject them, the thing will be of no farther consequence, and that your state will be no worse than it would o-

therwise have been. No, my brethren, this is far from being the case. As the same person who now prays you to be reconciled to God, has all judgement committed to him, and is to try you upon this very precise point, of your compliance or non-compliance with these his intreaties, will he not remember, yea, and cause you to remember too, every invitation, every urgent intreaty, every instance of his praying and beseeching you, by ambassadors, in his own name, and in his own stead? will he not remember them, as witnesses against you, and aggravations of your guilt, and refresh your own memory concerning them, to your bitter anguish and eternal confusion?

Have you any reason to expect, that your most humble and earnest addresses to that throne, which will be no longer a throne of grace, but a tribunal of justice, or your most fervent prayers and importunate cries for mercy, to him who will then be your judge, instead of your petitioner; have you any reason, I say, to expect that they will then be regarded, when the very articles of your indictment will be so many instances of your contemptuous disregard of his most earnest, importunate, and unwearied sollicitations? You who, after all the warnings that can be given, still turn a deaf ear to his prayers, and spurn away from you his most tender and affectionate intreaties, with what face will you then ask, or with what sense and modesty can you then expect any mercy from him? "Because I have called," says he, "and ye refused, I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: For that they hated knowledge, and did not chuse the fear of the Lord. They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way,

“and be filled with their own devices;” Prov. i. 24. — 31.

What would you have to answer, in case the slighted Judge should refresh your memory in some such terms as these : “ Did not I make you the fairest offers ? did not I give you the kindest invitations ? did not I urge, did not I solicit, did not I condescend even to pray you, and beseech you, to accept of them in season, at such and such a place, at such and such a time, before such and such witnesses, by such and such a minister ? Did not I give you sufficient intimation that he was then standing in my stead, and that it was I myself that was beseeching you by him ? Was not you fairly warned, that he who despised him, and rejected the calls and invitations given by him, rejected me ? Did I not set before your eyes the sacred symbols of my broken body and shed blood upon a communion-table, at such a place, and at such a place, for a sign of, and a ready seal to, that covenant I proposed to enter into with you ? to let you see, if such things were done in the green tree, what should be done in the dry ; to put you in mind of the love that I bore you, and the sufferings I submitted to for your sake, and thereby, if it had been possible, to wake the drowsy powers of your sluggish souls, and to rouse them to some degree at least of seriousness and attention. And did I not lay hold upon that opportunity, when your hearts might at least have been warmed, and your affections moved, to try if I could but by the advantage of that conjuncture, insinuate into your souls a relish for the kind proposal I then made you ? In a word, how often would I have gathered you as a hen doth her chickens under her wings, and you would not ? how many repulses did I bear ? how many affronts did I put up ? how many slights did I overlook ? how many refusals did I forgive ? and, after all, how patiently did I persevere in knocking at the door of your heart, sermon after sermon, and sacrament after sacrament ? and still ye would not. Did I not then warn you, that, how patiently soever I bore all in the mean time, yet every call was entered upon record, faithfully registered,

“ and carefully reserved to the judgement of this day,
 “ and that every one of them would contribute its part
 “ to confound you, and give each an additional weight
 “ to that vengeance which is now falling upon you ?
 “ And though you contradicted my word, and gave
 “ the lie to my threatenings, by your conduct then,
 “ do you think I am to do the same by my conduct
 “ now ? ”

And now, my brethren, if there are any of you who
 are here present that shall afterwards be found at the
 left hand of this despised Judge, and were to hear such
 words addressed to you from the dread tribunal, I ask
 you, would not your own consciences be obliged to at-
 test the truth of every syllable of such an expostulation ?
 And pray what could you pretend to reply in answer to
 it ? Would not such an appeal to your own refreshed
 memories, and such a witness borne against you by your
 own awakened consciences, strike you speechless, and o-
 verwhelm your souls ? Is it not so, my brethren ? Are
 you not convinced, that in such a situation you would
 be inexcusable ? I dare say there is not a conscience
 here that is attending to what has been said, without be-
 ing convinced that you *ought* to be reconciled to God.
 O then let me follow this blow, and let conviction have
 its perfect work. Will you persevere in such measures
 now as you are sensible will confound you then ? Can
 you now approve of the very same step, which, you
 cannot deny, must be disapproved by you in another si-
 tuation ? Though then it will be, it is not yet too late.
 Christ has not yet put on the stern air of a judge. He
 is yet condescending to pray and beseech you by me to
 be reconciled unto God. O pity your town perishing
 souls, and hearken unto him before it is too late. Pray
 for the spirit of conviction, and pray that God would
 grant your request, and give the Holy Spirit to them
 that ask him. Amen.

S E R M O N V.

2 COR. v. 20.

Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us : we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.

[Second Sermon on this text.]

MY brethren, the great message of the gospel, which we are obliged to insist upon with you at all times, is that of the text, *be ye reconciled to God*; but, in a more particular manner, this is our errand to you while you are preparing to celebrate the holy sacrament of the Lord's supper. This is a sort of public market of free grace, wherein God exhibits and shews unto you the rich benefits he is ready to bestow upon all his friends, shews them to the greatest advantage, and in the most striking light in which it is possible for us to perceive in this state of distance and imperfection; and at the same time sends his heralds and messengers openly to proclaim the freest and fullest offer of them to you all, not only to invite, but likewise earnestly to beseech and obtest you to accept of them.

I am in hopes, indeed, that there are some among you who have already complied with these calls, and accepted of these invitations that have been formerly given to you, especially upon occasions of this nature; but, alas! my brethren, one must be a very great stranger to what commonly passes in the world, not to be sensible how many there are still, even among those who

venture to sit down at a communion-table, who cannot, even by the most charitable construction, if we judge at all by the rules of the gospel, be reckoned among the number of those who are reconciled to God.

Now it is certain, that all those communicants who are not reconciled to God, are unworthy partakers of that holy ordinance, and do, by sitting down at the Lord's table in a state of enmity against him, eat and drink judgement to themselves. So that whether we consider the necessity of complying with this exhortation, in order to worthy communicating, or whether we consider the great number of those who, it is too justly to be feared, have not yet complied with it, there cannot be a more seasonable introduction to the work of this day than what we have now before us in the text. It was for this reason that I read these words to you upon the last occasion of this nature, and that I now read them to you again. In discoursing from them, I endeavoured to press upon you this earnest intreaty, *first*, From the consideration of the person whose message it is; and that is, God himself, and his blessed Son our Saviour Jesus Christ: "We are ambassadors for Christ, God doth beseech you by us in Christ's stead." *2dly*, From the consideration of the manner and form of this message, and the way how this intreaty is made to us. It is in the most moving and pathetic, the most tender and affectionate manner; no less than *beseeching* and *praying* from God and Christ. *3dly*, From the consideration of the subject of this message, and the advantages of complying with it. It is to be *reconciled unto God*.

Having discussed the consideration of the person whose message it is, I proceed now,

II. To enforce this exhortation, from the consideration of the manner and form of it, and the way how it is made to us. It is in the most moving and pathetic, the most tender and affectionate manner; no less than *beseeching* and *praying* from God and Christ. And as we proceed in the consideration of this part of the argument, I desire that you would all along bear in your minds the remembrance of what was said on the first

head, as what will contribute much to strengthen the argument in that view of it in which it is now to be laid before you. To be accosted in so tender and affectionate a strain, to be earnestly beseeched and prayed in so moving and pathetic a manner, be from whom it will, one would think should of itself be sufficient to make some impression upon us: but it must be a hard heart indeed that can stand out, when it is considered whose intreaties these are; that he who thus addresses us in so tender and melting a strain, and who condescends to *beseech* us and *pray* us with so much earnestness and importunity, and in so moving and affectionate a manner, is the Son of God, who, besides that he is our absolute sovereign, whom we are bound, in every intimation of his will, to obey, is particularly commissioned and authorised to transact this affair with us; that he is one who is not only endued with infinite wisdom and understanding in all things, but deserves, in a more particular manner, to be attended to upon this subject, having had an experimental knowledge of what it is, both to have the favour of God, and to want it; that he is one to whom we lie under the strongest obligations, having actually suffered the greatest torments in his own person, in order to bring about our reconciliation to God; and, in a word, the very person who is at last to be our judge upon this very point. When we consider him in this view, one would think, that if he did at all condescend to speak to us upon so important a subject as our reconciliation with God, the least intimation of his sense of this matter would have so much weight with us, that there would be no occasion for him to urge and solicit us with any importunity. How then can we resist the pathetic address wherewith he accost us in my text, “as though God did beseech you, we pray you,” &c.

In order to give this argument its due weight, I shall take occasion, from the manner in which we find Christ addressing us in this text, to lay before you, in one view, an account of that extraordinary and affecting earnestness and solicitude which he always discovers when he applies to us upon this subject; which is such as may sufficiently apprise us of what importance an affair must be, that Christ appears to have so much con-

cern about, and how hard those hearts must be that can resist an application to them that is conducted in such a manner. Now if we examine and compare together the several accounts that we have in the scripture of the conduct of Christ towards us fallen sinners, in order to prevail with us to be reconciled to God, after he himself has prepared the way, by the satisfaction that he has made to the justice of God by his own death and sufferings, and particularly as it is represented to us in the text, as well as in this sacrament, we will find, that every step he takes, and every circumstance of his addresses to us, is moving: For, (1.) He prevents our application; (2.) He patiently waits; (3.) He freely offers; (4.) He lovingly invites; (5.) He positively commands; (6.) He persuasively reasons; (7.) He importunately solicits and incessantly urges; and, *lastly*, He passionately bewails our refusals.

1. Although all the distress is on our part, and the advantage of being reconciled to God would accrue to ourselves, yet he prevents our application. If a parcel of rebels against an earthly sovereign were reduced to such straitened circumstances, that it would be impossible for them either to go on in their attempt, or to withdraw from the justice of their sovereign, one would be much more naturally led to expect, that they would send a deputation to him, and implore his mercy, than that he should send ambassadors to them, and the first proposals and agreement should come of his side. And yet this is evidently the case here. Though it is impossible to conceive rebels in more desperate circumstances than what we are all of us in by nature, or a sovereign farther beyond the reach of our vain attempts; yet it is abundantly obvious, that the ambassadors in the text are by no means from us to him, but from him to us: "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us."

The Apostle John tells us, 1 John, iv. 19. "We love him, because he first loved us." And indeed it abundantly appears, that every step that is made towards a reconciliation is all on his side, Hos. xiii. 9. "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thine help." And Isa. lxiii. 5. "And I looked, and there was none

“ to help; and I wondered that there was none to up-
 “ hold: therefore mine own arm brought salvation un-
 “ to me, and my fury, it upheld me.” And as all the
 preparatory steps are entirely of his taking, so the first
 motion and proposal of agreement comes from *him* to
us. He accosts us upon this subject when we are not
 so much as thinking upon any such matter: Isa. lxxv. 1.
 “ I am sought of them that asked not for me: I am
 “ found of them that sought me not: I said, Behold
 “ me, behold me, unto a nation that was not called by
 “ my name. I have spread out my hands all the day
 “ unto a rebellious people.” Prov. viii. 1.—5. “ Doth
 “ not wisdom cry? and understanding put forth her
 “ voice? She standeth in the top of high places, by the
 “ way in the places of the paths. Unto you, O men,
 “ I call, and my voice is to the sons of man. O ye
 “ simple, understand wisdom; and ye fools, be ye of
 “ an understanding heart.” Indeed we afford too me-
 lancholy a proof by our own conduct, how little the
 first advances in this matter are to be imputed to our-
 selves. So far are we from beginning to seek after any
 agreement with him, that it is with the greatest difficul-
 ty that any of us can be prevailed on to accept of such
 a proposal when it is made to us. My very business with
 you at this moment, my present endeavours to persuade
 you to be reconciled to God, is a sufficient evidence
 how little this matter has come of yourselves. What
 else is the preaching of the gospel, but proclaiming and
 urging proposals of reconciliation to those who refuse
 to accept of them? as we have it, Matth. xxii. 2.—5.

Now, very frequently it happens, in cases of differen-
 ces among men, that even when both parties are sensible
 it would be their interest to be reconciled, it sticks,
 however, still at the stubbornness of each of their hu-
 mours, that will hardly bend to make the first advances.
 If matters could but be got so far adjusted, that, as we
 use to say, the ice was once fairly broken, the greatest
 difficulty of all, in many cases, would be over. Now,
 my brethren, in order to our reconciliation with God,
 if we should stand upon a point of honour, or rather of
 humour, and our pride would scorn to stoop so much
 as to make the first advance towards an agreement, our

false delicacy is so far indulged, God makes the first step towards us. If we scorn to address him, he does not scorn to address us. If we will not beg reconciliation of him, lo ! he begs it of us : " As though God did *beseech* you, we *pray* you in Christ's stead."

But, 2. Not only does he prevent our application, and make the first approaches towards us, though he be the offended party, and, at the same time, is quite beyond the reach of suffering any thing by the difference, which is to our detriment, not his ; but as we are not so ready to comply with his proposal as might be expected, he is so far from resenting our obstinate and unreasonable refusals, as he justly might, and taking us at our first foolish word, that he patiently waits for our tardy and lingering consent. And to illustrate this, let us suppose an earthly sovereign, after he had reduced a parcel of rebels to the most helpless condition, so that they had nothing to hope for but their prince's mercy, condescending in that case to make proposals of agreement to them when they could least expect it : suppose, that, instead of closing immediately with so seasonable a proposal, they should chuse to continue still in rebellion against so gracious a sovereign, and obstinately refuse to lay down their arms : how do you think would any of our fellow-creatures take such usage ? When the least hint of any merciful intentions might be expected to be grasped at with the greatest eagerness, to see the plainest offers of favour rejected with disdain, would any body imagine that such treatment could be borne, and that they would be left to commit more acts of rebellion, in hopes that they might at last be brought to grant the mighty favour, forsooth, of consenting to their own preservation ?

And yet this is the way that God deals with us in the gospel. If we were in a disposition to lay hold on the first offers of grace that are made to us, and were so sensible of our own interest, as to receive with joy the most distant hint of the divine mercy, there would be no occasion for *praying* and *beseeching* us, as we find in the text. No, my brethren, such sort of application to us evidently supposes our unwillingness to accept of the proposals that are made to us, and some degree at least

of obstinacy on our part; and as there would be no occasion for praying and beseeching, if the very first offer was accepted by us, so there would be no such thing as praying and beseeching, if God always took us at our first word. The very nature of this sort of application to us implies in it a patient waiting for our compliance.

Hence we find the long suffering of God so frequently and so justly insisted upon in the scripture, *Exod. xxxiv. 6.* "And the Lord proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity," &c. And in *Isaiah, xxx. 18.* "And therefore would the Lord wait, that he may be gracious unto you." *1 Pet. iii. 20.* "The long suffering of God waited in the days of Noah." *2 Pet. iii. 9.* "His long suffering to us ward, not willing that any should perish." And therefore it is no wonder that we find God so often complaining, that sinners make so bad an improvement of this his patience and long suffering: *Rom. ii. 4.* "Despiseest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long suffering?" *Eccles. viii. 11.* "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." But whatever abuse this conduct may be capable of, it certainly is the most surprising condescendence to our folly and stupidity, and most kindly intended to win us: *1 Tim. i. 16.* "Howbeit, for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all long suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." And as this has been God's method with sinners formerly, so are not you sensible, that you yourselves are at this moment so many instances of the same gracious condescension? Has not the same offer of the gospel that continues still to sound in your ears been formerly made to you, particularly from this very place, and on occasions of this same kind? Are there not many among you who have refused or delayed to accept of it on these former occasions, and yet is not God continuing, after all, to make it again to you at this very moment? "Behold how he stands at the door, and

“ knocks,” Rev. iii. 20. stands with patience, and continues to knock, sermon after sermon, and sacrament after sacrament. How justly may Christ say to many of you as he said once to Jerusalem, “ O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not ?”

Again, consider, 3dly, That as he patiently waits, so he *freely offers*. One would be apt to conclude, upon seeing ambassadors coming from a powerful King to a helpless company of desperate rebels, that he had it in commission only to propose their yielding at discretion, and submitting to the will of their injured and provoked prince, or at best to propose such terms as the forfeiting of their estates, or at least paying costs and damages, in order to the saving of their lives.

But what is it, think you, that we who are ambassadors from God, than whom there cannot be a more powerful prince, have in commission to propose to you, than whom there cannot be imagined more provoking and more helpless rebels ? Does he require of you to satisfy his offended justice, and repair his injured honour ? This, I can tell you, our blessed Redeemer has already done, in a manner infinitely more to the glory of the divine majesty than all that you could have done by any doings, or by any sufferings. And now that all preparation is already made, what God requires of you is only, that you would be reconciled to God. He offers to be reconciled to you immediately ; he offers a full and ample reconciliation, not only to lay aside his anger, which you have exposed yourselves to, but to receive you into his favour, and to communicate to you the most beneficial effects of his friendship. He offers this freely, without requiring any thing on your part by way of purchase of this favour. He requires of you indeed, that you submit to the laws which you have broken, that is, that you be no longer rebels. But he requires nothing of you that is not for your own advantage, nothing that can be any reparation of the wrong you have done, or that is any sort of equivalent for the favours you are to receive, and, in a word, nothing that does, in the smallest degree, detract from the

freeness of the offer, which runs in terms than which nothing can be imagined more free: If. lv. 1. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat, yea come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price." Rev. xxii. 17. "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

4thly, He does not content himself with the bare proposal even of the freest and largest offers, but he gives us the kindest and *most affectionate invitations* to accept of them. I doubt not but if a temporal prince could be brought but to propose such a free reconciliation, to make the bare offer of it unto conquered rebels, every body would think it condescension sufficient, and no body would imagine, that the matter was to be carried any farther length on his part. And surely, if the rebels had yet any sense of their interest remaining, they neither could expect, nor would they wait for their prince's condescending to give them any kind and friendly invitations to accept of this favour.

But every body that has heard a preached gospel, must be sensible that God does more therein, than barely to let us know that he is reconcileable; and every body that considers this text, must see that there is at least contained in it a kind and affectionate invitation, whatever more. The nature of the gospel is held forth to us under the similitude of a king making a marriage for his son, and sending his servants to invite guests to this wedding. See Matth. xxii. 3. 4.; If. lv. 1.; Matth. xi. 28.; John, vii. 37. &c.

5thly, Nay, he positively *commands* you to accept of this invitation. Let not the condescending terms that are used in the text, of praying and beseeching, make us so far unmindful of the greatness of him whose language this is, as to overlook that awful authority which every intimation of his will ought to have with us. Who is it that beseeches you? is it not the great God, the author and preserver of your beings, who is your absolute sovereign, and can, if he pleases, crush you into atoms? We are ambassadors for God, says the apostle. It is God that beseeches you by us; and if the very mention of him does not make you sufficiently sensible of the

authority which this message carries along with it, we find it many times delivered in scripture in the plain form of a command; such as, Ezek. xviii. 31. "Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed, and make you a new heart and a new spirit; for why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: Wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye." Nay, we are directly told that it is his express command, Acts, xvii. 30. "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent." 1 John, iii. 23. "And this is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment."

But though our folly may overlook his greatness, and forget his authority, yet his greatness is not unmindful of our folly and obstinacy; and therefore, *6thly*, He condescends to *reason* the matter with us, as a man would do with his equal. He so far accommodates himself to our weakness, as to lay aside the awfulness of his majesty, and to wave that authority wherewith he has a right to support his commands, that he may, as it were, upon equal terms talk with us, in sober seriousness, and plead what is really *our* cause as if it were his *own*, appealing to the conviction of our own minds as to the reasonableness of our conduct: Is. i. 18. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Chap. v. 3. 4. "And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard, what could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?" Chap. xli. 21. "Produce your cause, saith the Lord, bring forth your strong reasons, saith the King of Jacob." Jer. ii. 5. 9. "Thus saith the Lord, What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me? Wherefore I will yet plead with you, saith the Lord, and with your children's chil-

"dren will I plead." Thus we find our Saviour, in the New Testament, frequently reasoning the matter, and appealing to the conviction of the people's own minds; and, in imitation of his example, his apostle did the same. So it is said of Paul, Acts, xviii. 4. "That he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks." And sure I am, my brethren, never can there be, upon any subject, stronger arguments, or more convincing and persuasive reasoning, than what God uses with us, in order to procure our consent to his proposals, such reasoning as, I am sure, never can be confuted. See how strongly Moses reasons upon this subject, Deut. xxx. 15. 19.

But, 7thly, As he knows very well how much our minds are blinded to the reason of things, and that, if there is any hold to be got of us at all, it is as much by our passions as by our reason; so, after all his reasoning, he continues incessantly to urge and importunately to solicit us, *praying and beseeching*. If you can imagine what would be the yearning of the bowels of a tender-hearted parent, what would be the serious and earnest expostulations of a fond and compassionate mother towards an only child, that was playing heedlessly upon the brink of a terrible precipice; such appears to be the concern wherewith God urges and importunately solicits us to be reconciled to him. The many earnest and repeated calls that we meet with to this purpose in the scripture, expressed in terms that do sufficiently shew how much they come, if I may speak so, from the very bottom of his heart, may abundantly convince us how much he is in earnest in this matter: Ezek. xxxiii. 11. "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; why will ye die, O house of Israel?" Jer. xi. 7. "For I earnestly protested, rising early and protesting, saying, Obey my voice." Rom. xii. 1. I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God," &c. It is not an obstinate repulse or two that will put an end to his importunity; but he still continues to follow after even those that have turned their back upon his solicitations, and even, if I may use the term,

(which many impenitent sinners will perhaps think too just a one), to tease them out of their obstinacy : Rev. iii. 20. " Behold, I stand at the door and knock ; if any
 " man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come
 " in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." Jer. iii. 1. " They say, If a man put away his wife, and
 " she go from him, and become another man's, shall
 " he return unto her again ? shall not that land be
 " greatly polluted ? but thou hast played the harlot with
 " many lovers ; yet return again to me, saith the Lord." With what earnestness does he plead ? Jer. iv. 14. " O
 " Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that
 " thou mayest be saved : how long shall thy vain
 " thoughts lodge within thee ?" And how much does he seem to dread a refusal ? nay, he speaks as if he could not give it up, as if, after the manner of men, he would never be able to stand our final ruin : Hos. xi. 8.
 " How shall I give thee up, Ephraim ? how shall I deliver thee, Israel ? how shall I make thee as Adma ?
 " how shall I set thee as Zeboim ? Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together." Jer. xxxi. 20. " Is Ephraim my dear son ? is he a pleasant child ? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still : therefore my bowels are
 " troubled for him ; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord." Ah ! my brethren, does the great God discover to us such surprising earnestness, and so deep a concern, about our reconciliation, and shall it be regarded among ourselves as a matter of such trifling indifference ? It would scarcely be credible, that the Almighty Sovereign of the world would express himself in such terms upon any occasion, if they were not upon record, and still to be found in your Bibles ; and yet I have to add, what is no less extraordinary and surprising,

In the *last* place, That as there are sinners of that inveterate obstinacy, as to hold out against such a warm application ; so when he can do nothing more of this sort, he passionately *bewails* our folly and misery. There are some scenes of such deep and affecting distress, that the view of them will soften and melt the heart even of the boldest hero, into sympathetic tears of anguish and la-

mentation ; so that it may, in some sense, be said to unman him. And indeed, if there is any occasion where God, if we may speak it with reverence, seems to behave unlike to a God, it is upon the occasion of those repulses which he meets with from obstinate sinners, who refuse to be reconciled to him. As there is joy in heaven, by the testimony of our Saviour himself, over every sinner that repenteth ; so the obstinate impenitence of others is spoken of, as if it moved the Almighty to a degree that had some resemblance of the passions of a weak and helpless creature ; insomuch that we find him sometimes crying out in the same terms that are commonly used among us to express that anguish that arises in the mind upon some grievous disappointment : Is. xlviii. 18. " O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments ! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea." Ps. lxxxix. 13. " O that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways !" Deut. v. 29. " O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever !" Hence our disobedience is said to grieve the Holy Spirit, Eph. iv. 30. And what stronger metaphor could be chosen, to signify how grievous our conduct is to God, than that which we have, Amos, ii. 13. " Behold I am pressed under you as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves." None of all the affronts and the cruel usage that Christ met with when upon earth, seems to have affected him any thing equal to the hardness he found in mens hearts : Mark, iii. 5. " And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts." Hence we find it even drew tears from his sympathetic and compassionate eyes : Luke, xix. 41. " And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou at least in this thy day, the things which belong to thy peace ; but now they are hid from thine eyes." And to the same purpose is that pathetic and bewailing complaint, Matth. xxiii. 37. " O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets,

“ and stoneſt them that are ſent unto thee, how often
 “ would I have gathered thy children together, even as
 “ a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings? and
 “ ye would not.”

AND now, my brethren, that I have repreſented to you the methods that God takes to procure your conſent to this reconciliation, and conſequently the methods that he authoriſes me to uſe with you in his name, how can I better conclude this diſcourſe, than by applying to you in the ſame manner that I have been repreſenting, if it may, through his bleſſing, contribute to make ſome impreſſion upon ſuch of you as have never yet complied with the call of the goſpel.

And therefore, if there be any even thoughtleſs ſinner amongſt you, that never has entertained any ſerious thoughts of ſalvation: “ Unto you, O men, I call, and
 “ my voice is even to ſuch ſons of men. O ye ſimple,
 “ underſtand wiſdom; and ye fools, be ye of an under-
 “ ſtanding heart.” Chriſt is, by me, preventing your application. If you will not apply to him, I do in his name apply to you. And O if I could but rouse you out of that fatal lethargy, wherein you ſeem to be lulled aſleep, though upon the moſt dangerous brink of a ruinous precipice! O that I could awake you in time, and prevent your being awakened at laſt with the flames of hell about your ears!

I know you have been deaf to many ſuch calls, and have formerly rejected theſe propoſals. But God does not take you up ſo ſhort. He does not allow me to take you up ſo ſhort; and why will you take yourſelves then ſo ſhort? Though you have formerly reſuſed to open, behold how he ſtill ſtands knocking at the door of your hearts, and offers to bring you the greateſt bleſſings, if you will but open to him, and receive them.

My brethren, I do, in his name, not only by his allowance, but by his expreſs appointment and command, offer you pardon and peace, grace and glory, a full pardon, a great and eternal weight of glory. I do, by virtue of that commiſſion wherewith I, as an ambaffador for Chriſt, am clothed, offer you from him who is a-

dundantly able to make good whatever he promises, a deliverance from the most exquisite misery, and a right to the most exquisite happiness. I offer this to you freely, as well as fully. I know you have nothing that is equivalent to pay for the purchase of it; and I can tell you, that nothing such is expected or demanded. But you may come, and drink of the waters of life freely; come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price.

And I do heartily invite all of you to accept of these offers, and can assure you of a most kind and affectionate welcome. Be ye what and who ye will, be your sins ever so many, ever so great, ever so heinously aggravated, nay, whatever numerous and obstinate repulses, either I or any others of the messengers of Christ have received from you, upon former occasions; yet all these shall be put up, and I do now again heartily invite you. I can tell you, in the great King's name, that as he has made a marriage for his Son, so he hath prepared his dinner, his oxen and his fatlings are killed, and all things are ready; and he hath sent me to bid you come to the marriage.

Nay, if the kind, affectionate, and condescending language of inviting, will not prevail, I must likewise, in his name and authority, positively charge and command you to come, as you would answer for your disobedience at the tremendous tribunal of your Maker and Judge. And I solemnly warn you, that if you refuse, it is at your utmost peril. And dare any of you wilfully sit such a summons? What wretch among you is so presumptuous as to dispute such peremptory orders? or take upon you to fly in the face of such authority? for he that in this case despises me, despiseth him; and he that rejecteth me, rejecteth him.

But whatever authority I might justly be bold to use with you in this matter, I could willingly, in imitation of him whose authority it is, wave insisting upon it; and if that would contribute any thing to the success of my message, I am willing to descend from it, and reason the matter with you upon equal terms. Is not the favour of God, think you, worth the seeking after? Is not exquisite and everlasting misery to be avoided?

Is not exquisite and everlasting happiness desirable? Can you say, that it is a matter of indifference, whether you are in a state of reconciliation with God or not? whether you have the Omnipotent Sovereign of the world for a friend or an enemy? Ah! my brethren, I am abundantly sure, that it is not the reason of things that determines you. Would to God that you were but in a disposition to be determined by the strength of arguments! and then I should readily hope that the matter would not stick long. It is at the obstinacy of your own perverse wills, and the prevalence of your corrupt inclinations, that the matter sticks: is it not? You cannot, you dare not, deny but it is.

And therefore let me, in the most earnest and importunate manner, beseech and obtest you, in the bowels of Jesus Christ, and by the mercies of God, as you value your own precious and immortal souls, for which the world would be too cheap to be taken in exchange, as you would not be thought to throw them away like the vilest of things, and as you would shew yourselves to be men in whom the least spark of reason is yet left remaining, let me beseech you, in a word, by all that can be reckoned valuable, to be reconciled unto God. Let me beseech you but to think seriously on the matter. May you not comply thus far at least, to take so important a subject into your deliberate consideration? If you do this but in earnest, I would not be afraid of the issue. And such appears to me to be the necessity, such the importance, of this demand, such the terrible consequence of your refusal, that I could, if that would have any effect, even beg it of you on my bended knees. Our Lord Jesus Christ himself, you see in the text, condescends to pray it and beseech it of you: and what can I do less, when employed by him on this errand, but imitate his example? If you yourselves have no value for your own souls, if you can cease loving them, I must not cease loving them too. The Redeemer of souls, who has paid the purchase, and knows the value of them, cannot but speak of them agreeable to the importance of them: and can you find in your heart to refuse what he so importunately prays and beseeches of you?

And now, my brethren, shall we yet, after all, have occasion for the last method whereby Christ discovers his concern for your souls, that of bewailing and bemoaning your obstinacy? Shall I say, I am afraid (alas! I wish I could not say) that I know, there will be still too much occasion for it. O that the case were otherwise! O that you would disappoint me! for a flood of waters, and eyes that were fountains of tears, would be too little to weep for the misery of those who shall finally reject the offers that have been made to you this day. Tears that are more precious than those of the whole race of Adam, have been shed upon such an occasion, even the tears of a Redeemer, the tears of him who was the Son of God.

But may I not hope, that there are some at least among you who have been prevailed with at this time, as well as many who have complied upon former occasions? May I not hope, that your sitting down at the table of the Lord is in consequence of your having accepted this offer of reconciliation with him, and, in effect, a declaration of your consent to the gospel-terms of this reconciliation? This, I doubt not, is the case with some. And that it may indeed be the case with you all, may God, of his infinite mercy, grant, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

S E R M O N VI. *

DEUT. v. 28. & 29.

And the Lord heard the voice of your words, when ye spake unto me; and the Lord said unto me, I have heard the voice of the words of this people, which they have spoken unto thee: they have well said all that they have spoken. O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!

MY brethren, if there were nothing else necessary for recovering the favour of God, but professions, promises, and engagements, you who have been this day at the holy table of the Lord, would indeed be in a very fair way to attain the salvation of your souls. You have made a good profession before many witnesses; and there cannot be imagined more solemn promises, stricter and more sacred engagements, than those which you have this day entered into. And if there were no instances of people breaking such promises, belying such professions, and living contrary to such engagements, you would have the more reason to indulge yourselves in security; and we might all of us entertain ourselves this evening with a much more agreeable prospect. But as it is not promises or professions, nay nor even bare resolutions themselves, that will be sufficient for the salvation of our souls; so the general practice and experience of the world gives but too just occa-

* Preached after the celebration of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

fion to cry out, after the most solemn professions of religion are made, "O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!" And therefore I think our minds cannot be better employed, than in taking a review of these engagements which we have entered into, reflecting upon the danger we are in of breaking them, and endeavouring to fortify ourselves in the good resolution of living conformable to them; so that the words I have now read will afford us a subject abundantly proper for our present meditation.

In this chapter we find Moses relating to the children of Israel the history of a very memorable and remarkable solemnity, that of giving the law upon Mount Sinai, which is here called the covenant of Horeb; and, in the verse immediately preceding those which I have read, he puts them in mind of the express consent which they themselves had given to that covenant, the occasion of which was this: As the dispensation of the law was not so mild as that of the gospel, when God appeared upon Mount Sinai to make this covenant with them, and give them the law, his appearance was very terrible, and accompanied with such circumstances as could not well fail to strike the most extraordinary awe and dread of him into their minds. He descended with thunderings and lightnings, in the midst of devouring fire, surrounded with thick clouds and darkness. The mountain trembled and quaked under him, and was itself altogether on fire; so that the smoke of it ascended like the smoke of a furnace. This awful appearance did so affect the minds of the Israelites, that though, on the one hand, they begged of Moses to act the part of mediator between God and them, and chose rather to receive his commandments by means of Moses, than to hear them immediately from so awful a being as God himself; yet, on the other hand, they expressly promised and engaged to give attention and obedience to whatever God should be pleased to enjoin them: "Go thou near," say they, "and hear all that the Lord our God shall say; and speak thou unto us all that the Lord our God shall speak unto thee, and we will

“hear it, and do it,” vers. 27. Then follow the words of my text: “And the Lord heard the voice of your words, when ye spake unto me; and the Lord said unto me, I have heard the voice of the words of this people, which they have spoken unto thee: they have well said all that they have spoken. O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!”

In these words we may observe the few following things.

1. The notice which God took of what they said: “And the Lord heard the voice of your words, when ye spake unto me; and the Lord said unto me, I have heard the voice of the words of this people, which they have spoken unto thee.” They spoke it immediately to Moses; but Moses did not need to repeat their words unto God, as he needed to repeat God’s words unto them. As God has a most exact and particular knowledge of every thing we do, every thing we speak, and every thing we think; so, in a special manner, he knows what we do, speak, or think, in divine worship, and our solemn transactions with himself in religion. Although they endeavoured to keep at a distance from his glorious presence upon the mount, which was so awful and terrible unto them; yet it was impossible for them to remove at the least distance from that essential presence of him whereby he fills all places, and understands all things. And though his presence in our assemblies is not so sensible, and far from having such a terrible appearance as of old, when he gave the law; yet we may assure ourselves, that where-ever two or three are met together in his name, there is he in the midst of them, to take exact notice of what they do, and of the disposition of their minds, as well as of the words of their mouths, upon such occasions.

2. We may observe the approbation that God gives to what was good in their behaviour: “They have well said all that they have spoken.” Though their heart was not quite right with God, neither were they so upright and sincere in his covenant as they should have

been; yet they made fair promises, and, it is probable, at least with respect to the greatest part of them, that their hypocrisy was not so great as to promise what they did not mean to perform. I doubt not, that what they said was according to the present views they had; and that they then intended to be as good as their word: so that God, who not only heard their words, but was privy to their most secret intentions, might know, that they not only engaged with their mouths, but, in some measure, with their hearts also, to obey him; and that there was a real resolution, such as it was, to perform what they had promised. And though their promise, and perhaps resolution, was not so well founded, and so deeply rooted, as was necessary in order to make it effectual; yet they were right in forming such a resolution, and carrying it so far as to bind themselves by a formal promise: "They have well said all that they have spoken."

3. We have a plain intimation that this promise and resolution of theirs was not to be depended upon; and that God foresaw it would be very ill kept: "O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!" The concern which is here expressed by God for their living conformably to their engagements, does plainly imply, that the contrary was what would happen. Thus he says, Ps. lxxxi. 13. "O that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways!" implying that they had not done so. The same thing is more directly expressed in that pathetic exclamation and wish of our Saviour, which you will find in Luke, xix. 41. *et seq.* The most positive promises and engagements are so far from being to be relied upon, that even when we are conscious to ourselves of a real resolution to perform them, we have great need to distrust it, and examine into the grounds and the firmness of it. There are too many instances of the fairest promises, and the most solemn engagements, being in process of time forgotten, and vanishing into smoke. Yea, so fickle and inconstant are we, that our resolutions and engagements are apt to impose even

upon ourselves. But however we ourselves may be deceived by them, he with whom we have to do, not only discerns what is good in our behaviour, but has always a clear and distinct view of the real state of our minds, and the true disposition of our souls; and he has but too often occasion to observe how slightly and carelessly we enter into engagements with him, and how far our best resolutions come short of that firmness which is necessary to carry us through the temptations and difficulties that are to be met with in the observance of them.

4. We may observe a most earnest concern expressed by Almighty God, that men would observe the engagements they enter into with him. This is likewise contained in the same part of the text: "O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!" which words imply, not only the danger they were in of breaking their engagements, but likewise a most earnest desire that they would keep them. It is true, when God is pleased to condescend so far to our capacities, as to put on any thing like human passions, and express himself in the manner we use to do on like occasions, we are to beware of understanding these expressions in such a sense as is consistent with ascribing any weakness or imperfection to the Deity. Absolutely speaking, there is no doubt but his counsel shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure; but as the supreme being does in many cases see it fit to leave men to themselves, so, when they behave in a foolish manner, he often expresses his displeasure of their conduct with the vehemence of human passion, in order to convey to our minds particularly this threefold impression of the matter: 1st, That mens disobedience proceeds entirely from themselves; 2^{dly}, That as their disobedience is extremely disagreeable, so their behaving in a different manner would be extremely acceptable to him; 3^{dly}, That he would with pleasure communicate happiness to his creatures, if they would not render themselves incapable of it.

5. We have the things that this people had engaged to upon this occasion, and which God desires so

earnestly the performance of by them; and that is, "That they would fear God, and keep all his commandments always." This is a general account of those engagements that must be entered into upon occasion of every solemn transaction with God about the salvation of our souls; and indeed it is the complete summary of our duty, which the wise preacher delivers us as the conclusion of the whole matter, Eccles. xii. 13. "Let us hear," says he, "the conclusion of the whole matter, Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man." And it is almost a repetition of what they themselves had promised: "Speak thou unto us all that the Lord our God shall speak unto thee, and we will hear it, and do it." Only, in the repetition of it here by God, the thing is expressed more fully and distinctly, to teach us to be distinct and particular in our engagements with God. The fear of God is added here as the affection of the soul, which, under the legal dispensation of terror, was commonly put for all that regard men ought to have for God in religion, and indeed was used to signify the whole of religion. And the universality and constancy of that obedience which God requires is likewise more pointedly and distinctly expressed. It is not only to keep his commandments that we must engage, but *all* of them, and that *always*, as I shall endeavour to explain more fully afterwards.

In the *last* place, We have a strong motive and encouragement to induce us to keep such engagements: "That it may be well with them, and with their children for ever!" We ourselves have the strongest reason to wish that we would perform such promises; for though they are made to God, yet we ourselves would be the greatest gainers thereby.

Thus you see how many suitable objects of meditation these words present for an occasion of this nature. But in discoursing farther upon them, I shall only illustrate these few observations.

1st, That in our covenant-transactions with God, we ought solemnly to engage, and it is taken for granted

that we do so engage, "to fear him, and keep all his commandments always."

2dly, That as, upon such covenanting solemnities, we have to do and are transacting with God himself, so he hath a watchful eye over us, and taketh a most exact and particular notice of our behaviour upon such occasions.

3dly, That, even when the most solemn professions of fear and obedience to God are made, yea, and even some sort of resolutions actually entered into, so that men may imagine themselves to be sincere in the matter; yet there may be too much ground to suspect, and God may clearly discern, the want of sufficient firmness and steadiness in such resolutions and protestations.

4thly, That it would be a most desirable thing, and much to be wished for, that the good resolutions which are sometimes formed, and the engagements that are entered into upon solemn occasions, had really that firmness and steadiness which is so often desired, and that people would but be as good as their words upon such occasions: "O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!"

I. THE *first* observation is, That, in our covenant-transactions with God, we solemnly engage to fear him, and keep all his commandments always.

This observation I found upon the recapitulation made by God of the engagements which the people had entered into upon this occasion, vers. 29; and as, in this recapitulation, he does not confine himself to the words in which they had delivered their own mind, but makes some addition and amendment to their protestation, rather expresses what he desires they would do, we may take this as a general rule of conduct in our covenant-transactions with God, and as intended to point out what engagements he demands of us, and what we have ground to expect will be acceptable to him on such occasions.

And now, my brethren, as you have been this day transacting a covenant with God, nothing can be more reasonable, or afford you a fitter subject of reflection, after this solemnity, than to take a review of what you have this day engaged yourselves to; and therefore, in explaining the meaning of this account which God himself gives us of the engagements that were then taken, or at least should have been taken, by the ancient Israelites in the solemn covenant of Horeb, I shall consider them as so many things which you have solemnly declared and sworn to this day, and thus refresh your memories by putting you in mind of what is the express language of your sitting down at the holy table of the Lord. And, in taking this review, let it be your business to consider, whether you have been really sincere in entering into such engagements, and whether, upon cool reflection, you are satisfied with them, and still resolved to stand to them.

And, *first*, You have this day, in the general, solemnly undertaken and engaged to renounce and forsake that course of rebellion in which you are all naturally engaged against God, and to return to that allegiance which is due to him. We are all by nature rebels against God; we have renounced his rightful authority, spurned at his holy laws, and have said, in effect, we will not have him to reign over us, Eph. ii. 2. Now this is absolutely inconsistent with that fear of God which his perfections do justly challenge from us, Ps. xxxvi. 1.; and it is directly flying in the face of those commandments of his which we are bound to obey. And therefore, when we engage to fear him, and keep his commandments, the plain meaning of it is, that we declare ourselves displeased with this course of rebellion in which we have been engaged, that from this time we renounce and abandon it, and are henceforth resolved to live in due obedience and allegiance to that God whom we acknowledge as our rightful sovereign.

And is not this, my brethren, the express language of your sitting down at the holy table of the Lord this day? The sacrament of the Lord's supper is the sign and seal of a covenant of peace which he is willing to

make with rebels. The body and blood of your Redeemer, which is there represented as broken and shed for you, is a sufficient indication of the state matters were in between God and you before such a covenant-transaction was proposed and accepted. God sends to you while you are in a state of actual rebellion against him, and have the weapons of your unnatural warfare in your hands, offering you peace and pardon, if you are willing to lay down your arms, and accept of the mediation of his Son, who has been sacrificed for you, and proposing to have this covenant of peace ratified on both sides by the solemn ordinance and sacrament of the Lord's supper. Is not, then, your approaching to that holy table an express consenting to those conditions of peace and reconciliation? Is it not a formal exchanging, as it were, of the ratification of this treaty? If this be not the meaning of it, it is surely adding treachery to rebellion; for it is sufficiently intimated to you on the part of God, that this is what he designs by such an ordinance. And if you have not the same views as is given out by your professions and pretences, is it not as certainly a mocking of God, as it would be for rebels, who still persist in their rebellious designs, to come to terms of accommodation with a merciful prince, and actually to sign a treaty of peace with him, with no other intention than to befool him, and procure some advantage against him?

And now, my brethren, are you satisfied with this engagement, upon a review of it, and a reflection upon what you have done? Are you not sensible, that the sins you have been guilty of have led you into a most fatal and dangerous state of rebellion against the supreme ruler of all things, whose irresistible vengeance you are as little able to avoid as to bear? Are you not convinced how unreasonable in itself, and how foolish in regard of its consequences, such an unnatural rebellion is? And are you not heartily resolved to persist no longer in such a course, and firmly determined, through grace, to stand to those engagements which you have this day entered into, of submission and renewed allegiance to God? Why, if you be, then you must

give your consent likewise to what follows. For, more particularly,

2dly, You have this day engaged to live under a constant and awful sense of God, and to have a greater regard to him than most men seem to have, in the ordinary course and tenor of your life and actions. This is what we are commonly to understand by the fear of God in scripture; not that we are to have any slavish terror of God, or to live in a sort of dread for his great power, but that we should habituate ourselves to a more frequent consideration of him, and a more awful sense of his infinite perfections upon our minds; and that, in all the actions of our lives, we should have a greater regard to that divine presence which always surrounds us. The wicked generally behave as if there were no God, none that took any notice of their conduct, or would call them to an account for it, Pf. xiv. 1.; and hence they are so frequently described as men that forget God, and live without any sense upon their minds of a holy omniscient observer and supreme judge of their actions, Pf. ix. 17.; x. 4.; and xciv. 7. And therefore, when you engage to fear God, you promise that you will accustom your minds to an habitual sense of his glorious perfections, and suffer it to have a due influence upon your conduct; endeavouring, in the ordinary course of your lives, to order your actions with an awful regard to him who is at present the witness, but will ere long be the judge, of every one of us.

Particularly, is not this an engagement you have most expressly entered into this day, when you sat down at the holy table of the Lord? What was the great design of that rite which is instituted in this ordinance, but to keep up the remembrance of Christ among us, whom we are too apt to forget? And are we not enjoined, in the performance of this rite, to do it in *remembrance of him*? And though indeed the amazing love of God is what may be supposed chiefly to exercise our minds upon that occasion; yet are not the terrible strokes of divine justice upon our blessed Surety, which are there represented before our eyes, very proper for habituating our minds to impressions which may have a very great influence upon our lives? So that the lan-

guage of a communicant, who is in a proper disposition at the Lord's table, may be justly supposed to be something like this: "Lord, I confess that thy awful and tremendous justice, as well as thy endearing and amazing love, has been too little thought of by me, and has had too slight and inconsiderable an influence upon the course of my life; and I stand much in need of the frequent representation of it before my eyes. O that this help which thou hast instituted and appointed for me may contribute to impress my mind with that habitual sense thereof which I hereby own myself obliged to have, and which I do therefore promise to entertain, so that it may have a constant and powerful influence upon my life!"

And now, let me ask you again, Are you, upon a review, satisfied with this part of the engagement you have entered into this day? Are you resolved to guard against that heedless and fearless way of living, and that disregard of God, and of his awful threatenings, which so many seem to make their boast of? Are you not resolved to let him be your fear and your dread; and that you will not fear man, who can kill only the body, but him who can cast both soul and body into hell-fire? And will you not endeavour to entertain upon your minds such an habitual sense of him as may have a constant and powerful influence upon your lives? If you are not thus determined still to stand to those engagements, I assure you, you have not been worthy communicants.

But then, 3^{dly}, You have this day solemnly engaged to keep all God's commandments: I say, *all* God's commandments; for there is plainly an emphasis laid upon the universality of the obedience which is promised, and wished for, in the text and context. The people expressly engage, vers. 27. to do *all* that God should speak to them. And, in the recapitulation which God makes of their engagements, vers. 29. he takes care to express this circumstance very distinctly, because it is a circumstance very important, nay essential, in the matter.

The universality of our obedience is what distinguishes, I do not say a perfect, but even a true and sin-

cere, from a false obedience. If a partial obedience were sufficient for our salvation, there are few that would come short of it. If men had liberty to chuse among the commandments of God, and were allowed to make exceptions of such duties as were found to be most uneasy to them in the performance, and to indulge themselves in those lusts which it would be most difficult for them to abandon, there is scarcely any man who would not find instances where the refraining from some sins would have no great opposition in it to the peculiar bent of his mind, and the predominant passions of his heart. Accordingly we find this very people of Israel, even when they were in a very degenerate state, allowed by God to be very punctual in the practice of some duties, *Is. lviii. 2.* And as this was an obedience to the ritual, rather than the moral part of religion, so we find an instance, in the gospel, of one who was willing to take in most part of the moral law likewise into his religion, and was disappointed by our Saviour for lacking only one thing, *Mark, x. 20. 21.*; whereas those who give at all a sincere consent to God's covenant, give their consent universally to *all* his commandments without any exception or limitation. Thus it is said of Zacharias and his wife Elisabeth, "That they walked in *all* the commandments and ordinances of the Lord," *Luke, i. 6.* And the Psalmist David says for his own part, "I have refrained my feet from *every* evil way," *Pf. cxix. 101.* And, "I esteem *all* thy precepts concerning *all* things to be right; and I hate *every* false way," *Pf. cxix. 128.* And it is in this case only that he declares his hopes of any acceptance with God, *Pf. cxix. 6.*

And indeed our Saviour takes care to assure us, that this is an indispensable term of the gospel-covenant, *Luke, xiv. 26.* where the preferring him to the objects there mentioned sufficiently implies, that he must be preferred to every thing whatsoever; for nothing could be mentioned that is dearer to us than the things which are there named by him: and if there be no exception of the things we are to prefer him to, there can be no exception as to the commands we are to submit to. But you may observe likewise, that in this passage he most

expresly makes this a necessary condition of our being his disciples, as he does likewise, John, xv. 14. And the Apostle James explains the reason of this, James, ii. 10. 11. And hence it is observable, that the scripture denounceth damnation upon those who indulge themselves in the practice of so much as one known sin. Not to insist on several passages where single sins are mentioned by themselves with this view, see what the apostle declares, 1 Cor. vi. 9. where you would observe the manner of expression. It is not said, that those who are fornicators and idolaters, &c. i. e. those who are guilty of a complication of these sins, shall be excluded from the kingdom of God; but *neither* fornicators, nor idolaters, &c. implying, that any *one* of these sins unrepented of, i. e. persisted in, will be sufficient to ruin the person that indulges himself in it.

Let us then not imagine it to be a sufficient compliance with the gospel-covenant, if we renounce ever so many sins, so long as there is one that we continue to indulge ourselves in. What will it avail thee that thou art not an idolater, or adulterer, or murderer, if thou art unjust? for the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God. Again, what will it avail thee that thou art not a thief, or covetous, or a drunkard, if thou art however a reviler? for neither shall such inherit the kingdom of God. It would not save thy life, though thy head and heart, and the other parts of thy body, were whole, if thy lungs were ulcerated. One mortal wound will be the death of a man as certainly as an universal sore. One leak will sink a ship, though every other part of it were sufficient. And it would avail nothing to the defence of a city, if there were ever so strong fortifications made round the greatest part of it, if, at the same time, but one place were left defenceless, and the enemy permitted to enter. In like manner, if ever so many of the commandments of God were submitted to, yet if they be not all, if there be but one excepted, it will avail nothing to the salvation of a man's soul. "Now," saith the Apostle James, ii. 11. "if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law."

I have the rather chosen to explain this matter to you, because I am afraid that the acknowledged imperfection of the sincere obedience of good men may possibly lead some into mistakes about this matter; as it certainly will, if that imperfection, which is consistent with sincerity, be understood to be an imperfection of parts. Good men themselves are indeed imperfect as to the degree of their obedience; but they cannot be good men, if there is an imperfection as to the parts of it. And it is in these different senses that we find good men in scripture sometimes spoken of as being perfect in their obedience, sometimes as being imperfect. Job, chap. 9. vers. 20. tells us of himself, "If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me; if I say I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse." And yet of the same Job we are told by God himself, "That he was a perfect and an upright man," Job. i. 8. Both of these are consistent, if we understand the one, with regard to the extent of his obedience, as reaching to the *whole* of that law which is exceeding broad; and the other, with regard to the measure and degree of the same obedience. It was perfect, inasmuch as it comprehended the sincere practice of every necessary duty, and an opposition to every known sin, without any exception or reservation; but it was performed in an imperfect measure or degree, as the body even of an infant may be said to be perfect, if it want none of the parts or members of the human body, though at the same time none of these parts have yet arrived at that degree of strength and firmness which they have in a full-grown man.

But if this be indeed the tenor of the gospel-covenant, can any thing be a more express declaration, or a more direct engagement to it, than your sitting down this day at the table of the Lord? Let me then ask you again, if, upon this review of what you have done, you are still satisfied with such a transaction, and resolutely determined to stand to it? Are you not sensible, that if your engagements had been of a narrower extent, and had not comprehended *all* the commandments of God, they would have been utterly unacceptable to God, and ineffectual for the salvation of your own souls? Consider, then, whether there be any secret re-

servation, any lust you want to have spared, any duty you desire a dispensation from; for if this be the case with you, and you will not have it otherwise, you need not expect any advantage from this day's work.

4thly, You have this day solemnly engaged, not only to keep all God's commandments, but to keep them *always*. This is one of those amendments which God saw fit to add to the engagements of his people, as expressed by themselves, vers. 27. And indeed he had but too much reason to suspect the steadiness of this fickle and inconstant nation, who were obedient one day, and perversely inclined the next. But such a wavering and inconstant obedience, influenced perhaps only by some awful providence, or the solemnity of some extraordinary occasion of devotion, and languishing again as soon as the occasions of exciting it are over, can never be expected to meet with acceptance from God, or to promote the salvation of our own souls. Our Saviour acquaints us, that this temporary sort of religion is far from being unfrequent in the church, Matth. xiii. 20. 21. If a few fits and starts of obedience through the course of our lives would do the business, this would be a religion abundantly suitable indeed to such fickle and changeable creatures as sinners are, but wonderfully unsuitable to such a being as God, who is too great to be so egregiously trifled with, and wonderfully unfit for the purpose of renewing our natures, and qualifying us for the enjoyment of God in heaven, as well as plainly inconsistent with the terms of the gospel, as they are declared to us in scripture *. And hence we find the Psalmist David asserting the constancy, as well as the universality of his obedience, Ps. cxix. 20. "My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgement at all times;" and vers. 31. "I have stuck unto thy testimonies: O Lord, put me not to shame;" and at vers. 44. "So shall I keep thy law continually, for ever and ever;" and vers. 112. "I have inclined mine heart to perform thy statutes always even unto the end."

* See Rev. ii. 10.; Matth. xxiv. 13.; Heb. x. 38.

Is not this, then, my brethren, the language of your fealing covenant with God this day? You must surely have intended something more by so solemn a transaction, than to offer God only a day or two of extraordinary homage; now and then, in exchange for the rest of your life to be spent in disobedience to him. And though this be too much the practice of people who seem to put on something like devotion for a season, and perhaps really feel some good dispositions and resolutions stirring in their minds upon such an occasion as this; yet, when ever it is a little over, according to the true proverb, as it is called by the Apostle Peter, "They re-
turn with the dog to his vomit, and with the sow that
was washed to her wallowing in the mire." Yet I dare say when you had the signs and seals of God's covenant in your hands to-day, you could not imagine that this was a transaction only for a day, but that it implied an engagement to keep God's commandments *always*. Your sitting down at his table is virtually the same thing with the boring a servant's ear among the Jews, intimating, that you love your master so as that you are resolved to serve him for ever.

And now, my brethren, you who have been solemnly devoting yourselves this day to the service of God for ever, and getting your ears, as it were, nailed to the post of his door, have you any reason, upon reflection, to repent of what you have done? and when you review the transaction in this light, are ye not still determined to stand to it, and resolved, through grace, that, cost you what it will, you will persevere in the course you have entered into, and follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth? Are you not resolutely bent to surmount all the obstacles which lie in your way, and determined, whatever temptations or difficulties you may meet with, not to be deterred thereby from the practice of your duty? If you be not, you cannot be worthy communicants. Lastly, you have this day engaged, after you have done all you can, to say, in the matter of your justification, "We are unprofitable servants;" to renounce all confidence in your own obedience as the procuring and meritorious cause of the favour of God, and to have your recourse unto the obedience of Christ

for acceptance with God, as well as to depend on the assistance of his grace, for enabling you to perform your engagements. Though this be not so directly expressed in the text as the former particulars, yet it is most evidently implied in it; for it is impossible to entertain upon our minds that awful fear of God which is here mentioned, without becoming sensible what need we have of a mediator. And it is observable, that the awe of God which was upon the minds of the Israelites upon this occasion, put them upon employing Moses as a mediator between God and them, who in this respect was an eminent type of Christ. Besides, if we engage to keep all his commandments, is it not his express and his great commandment, "That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, as he gave us commandment?" 1 John, iii. 23.

And surely nothing can be plainer than that this is the language of your sitting down at the table of the Lord. It is Christ that is here exhibited to you, with his body broken and his blood shed for you, and set forth crucified before your eyes, as the only propitiation for sin. And is not your partaking of this ordinance an acceptance of this method of salvation, and declaring, that there is no other name given under heaven whereby you can hope to be saved?

And are you not, upon reflection, satisfied with this engagement likewise? Are you not still willing to receive Christ Jesus the Lord, that ye may walk in him, to be more and more rooted in and built up on him? Are ye not content to renounce all other ways of salvation, and to embark your souls on this bottom, and ready to say, "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world?" If you be not, you cannot be worthy communicants.

II. THE *second* observation was, That as, upon such covenanting solemnities, we have to do and are transacting with God himself; so he has a watchful eye upon us, and takes a most exact and particular notice of our behaviour upon such occasions.

This observation I shall briefly illustrate in these two particulars : 1. That we have to do and are transacting with God himself; 2. That our sincerity or falsehood in so doing is perfectly known to him.

1. It is certain, that upon such covenanting solemnities, we have to do with no less a being than the great God; and it is he himself with whom we transact upon such occasions. Many of the Israelites might possibly regard the solemn transaction mentioned in the text with no farther view than as it was made with Moses. Indeed there seems to be something like this in the demand they made, that Moses would transact the matter with God, and they with him : " Go thou near," say they, " and hear all that the Lord our God shall say ; " and speak thou unto us all that the Lord our God " shall speak unto thee ; and we will hear it, and do " it," verſ. 27. And it is too much to be feared, that many professing Christians, in the most solemn approaches they make unto God, do chiefly consider themselves, upon such occasions, as having to do with ministers perhaps, or mere men only. Are there not too many instances of men that adventure to approach the holy table at which you have been this day entertained, whose conduct gives us abundant reason to suspect that their views do not extend much farther, who behave in such a manner, as if they had no notion of any greater being with whom they have to do, than the men who admit them to this ordinance ? What else can be the meaning of the endeavours which are sometimes made upon such occasions, to conceal, and even deny, the truth of such practices as would, if they had been convicted of them, have excluded them from the participation of this ordinance ? What else can be the meaning of people pretending outwardly, upon such occasions, to be reconciled to their enemies, while, at the same time, as the course of their behaviour serves afterwards to discover, they still continue in the same spirit of malice and bitterness against them ? In a word, what else can be the meaning of many people putting on an outward shew of devotion upon such occasions, which afterwards evidently appears not to have been from the heart ? " honouring God with their lips," as

our Saviour observes, "while their hearts are far from him;" "Coming unto the holy assemblies," as Ezekiel, chap. xxxiii. 31. expresseth it, "as the people cometh, sitting down there as God's people, and hearing his words, but unwilling to do them: with their mouth shewing much love, while their hearts go after their covetousness." Does not the whole course of such a behaviour evidently imply, that the men who administer this ordinance are the only persons with whom such people imagine they have to do? Who is it they lay themselves out to please by attending it? To whom do all their views seem to be directed? Is there any thing in their behaviour that expresses their regard to God as the person with whom they are covenanting?

Indeed, my brethren, if you had man only to do with upon these occasions, the engagements you enter into would by no means have that awful binding power which they now have. There is no doubt, that if you solemnly promised and engaged even to men, that you would keep God's commandments, this promise would lay an additional obligation upon you; but if you consider such an engagement as entered into immediately with God himself, does not this add a prodigious weight to it, and render it still more sacred and binding? If a rebel should make promises of submission even to any of the King's officers, he should doubtless be under an obligation to perform his promise; but how much stronger an obligation still would most men reckon themselves under, if such an engagement were entered into immediately with the King in person? Now, kings, or any other creatures with whom we have to do, cannot receive engagements immediately in their own persons, but in one particular place, at one particular time, because their presence is necessarily limited and confined. They are therefore frequently obliged to employ others to take oaths of allegiance, and other engagements, in their stead. But when we enter into engagements with God, though there may be need of a mediator to render them acceptable, yet there is no need of directing our promises to any middle or third person

as supplying the absence of God *. Remember, then, my brethren, that what you did this day was in the immediate presence of God; and that your vows were directed, and your engagements made, immediately to himself. And surely it is impossible to be brought under more awful and sacred obligations.

But then consider, 2dly, That as you have transacted with, and promised to God himself immediately, and thereby your engagements should come to have the greater and more awful influence upon you; so you have sworn to one who has had a watchful eye upon you, and whom it is impossible for you to deceive. This is sufficiently intimated in the text, where we find God himself, not only declaring the particular knowledge he had of what had passed externally among them, "that he had heard the voice of their words;" but likewise intimating what a clear view he had of the real disposition of their minds, "O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always!" implying, that their outward professions were not the only part of their conduct that had been obvious to his view upon this occasion, but that he had, in a special manner, observed how their hearts stood affected towards him.

When perfidious men enter into engagements with their fellow-creatures, and make professions and protestations of friendship to them, there is no doubt that they may, and in fact frequently have, imposed upon them, and so have sometimes remarkably served their own purposes: but, my brethren, there is not the least room for any such impositions in the present case; "For there is no creature that is not manifest in his fight, but all things are naked and open unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do," Heb. iv. 13. "Doth not he see your ways, and count all your steps?" Job. xxxi. 4. And particularly, his knowledge differeth from that of all others, in that it reacheth to the most retired corners of the soul, and penetrates even to the very bottom of the heart, every disposition and affection of which is as manifest in his eyes as

* See Acts, xvii. 27. 28.; 1 Kings, viii. 27.; Jer. xxiii. 23. 24.

if it were turned out naked before him *. He is said in scripture, Jer. xvii. 10. to *search and try*, not as if it were a work of difficulty and labour for him to penetrate into the hearts of men, but in order to denote the distinctness and exactness of the divine knowledge, as we commonly have the clearest and most perfect views of those things that we are at the pains to try and search into.

Remember, then, my brethren, that whatever fair appearances you have made this day before men; yet if your hearts be not right with God, if you have any secret reservations, and have yielded your consent to the gospel-covenant with an exception to any one of those terms which are there insisted upon, if there be any commanded duty which you will not yet submit to the performance of, or any sin which you are not quite resolved to abandon; if this is the case, whatever light your behaviour may appear in before your fellow-creatures, it is most distinctly and particularly noticed by him to whom your solemn vows were immediately addressed, and who will be so far from accepting your external and partial homage, that he will, and cannot but, abhor your vile dissimulation.

And indeed you have so much the more reason narrowly to inquire into, and reflect upon, the disposition of mind with which your engagements were entered into; because God distinctly perceives even such minute circumstances as may escape your own observation. You may not only impose upon others, but even upon yourselves likewise; and it is far from being an extraordinary thing, even for such as have reservations that are inconsistent with their engagements, to be looked upon as sincere, both by themselves and others, who are the witnesses of their behaviour. But it is impossible for you to impose upon him with whom you have to do. And this leads me to the

III. THIRD observation; which was, That even when the most solemn professions of fear and obedience to

* See 1 Kings, viii. 39; Prov. xv. 11.

God are made, yea, and even some sort of resolutions actually entered into, so that men may imagine themselves to be sincere in the matter; yet there may be too much ground to suspect, and God may clearly discern, the want of sufficient firmness and steadiness in such resolutions and protestations. So that the greater part of us, I dare say, have great reason, after all, to be distrustful of ourselves, and afraid lest, in the after course of our lives, we break those vows, and perhaps resolutions, which we have this day entered into, and so it appear that there was not such an heart in us as by our external conduct we have pretended.

This observation, though chiefly intended for the rousing and awakening impenitent sinners out of that security which is so fatal a disease, and so common amongst us, is, however, at the same time, (I am sorry to say it), far enough from being an observation in which good men themselves are altogether unconcerned; and therefore it cannot be unreasonable, towards the conclusion of this solemnity, to leave upon your minds such impressions of the danger you are in of breaking these solemn obligations you have been so lately bringing yourselves under, as may put you upon your guard, and contribute somewhat perhaps to fortify you against these temptations you are liable to. And for this purpose, I shall offer you the following considerations, whereby this observation will be farther confirmed and illustrated.

1st, Consider how many instances we have in scripture, of people making the fairest professions, and, in all appearance, entering into real resolutions of obedience, and yet, after all, continuing still in a course of habitual rebellion and disobedience to God *. And if such valiant champions and victorious heroes in the spiritual warfare have been foiled and overcome, how can such raw undisciplined soldiers as most of us are be sure that we shall be able to stand our ground? If tall cedars have been blown down by the storm of temp-

* See Mark, x. 17.; Matth. xxv. 1.; 1st Iviii. 2.; Matth. xiii. 20. 21.; Ps. cxix. 106.; 2 Sam. xi.; and Matth. xxvi. 33. 34. 35.

tation, what will become of such delicate and tender shrubs ?

2dly, Consider the former experience you yourselves have had of the weakness of your resolutions, even when they have run up into the most solemn vows and promises of amendment.

3dly, Consider the dangerous situation you are in, and the manifold reasons you have to be afraid of yourselves; which evidently appear when you consider the following things.

1st, The natural inconstancy of your own hearts, which is so great, that, even if the commands of God were more agreeable to our natural inclinations than we feel they are; yet the experience which we daily have of the fickleness and inconstancy of our own minds might justly fill us with apprehensions, lest we should come to lose that relish of them which perhaps we have at present. We may, all of us, feel in our experience, how apt we are to weary of every thing, and that we are so much given to change, that the greatest enjoyments do in time so satiate and cloy us, that we at length grow sick of them, and long for something new: hence that pathetic expostulation of the Prophet Hosea, ch. vi. 4.; and for this reason are our hearts so frequently spoken of in scripture as *deceitful*, and *not to be trusted*, Jer. xvii. 9.; and compared to deceitful bows, which abide not in their strength *. The constant experience which every observing man may have of this, is sufficient of itself to alarm us, and give us a distrust and suspicion of ourselves, even although the duties of religion were more suited than they are to the natural inclination of our souls. But how justly may this jealousy be increased, when we consider,

2dly, How diametrically opposite these duties are to the natural inclination of our hearts †.

3dly, That all the sensible objects among which we live prove so many dangerous temptations and fatal snares to us ‡.

* Ps. lxxviii. 5.; Hof. vii. 16.

† 2 Pet. i. 10.

‡ 2 Pet. i. 10; John, xvii. 11.

4thly, The company with which we are furround-
ed *.

5thly, The grand enemy by whom all these are ma-
naged †.

6thly, The corruption of our nature ‡.

My brethren, my design in representing to you in so strong a light the danger you are in of breaking these obligations you have brought yourselves under, is by no means to deter you from attempting to live conformable to them, as if the thing were desperate or impossible, but only to guard you against trusting, either to outward professions, or even inward resolutions, and to convince you of the necessity there is, if you would keep your engagements, to set about it in earnest, and with the greatest diligence, and the utmost application. In order to persuade you to this, I should now proceed to the

IV. FOURTH observation; which was, That it would be a most desirable thing, and much to be wished for, that the good resolutions which are sometimes formed, and the engagements entered into upon solemn occasions, had really that firmness and steadiness which is so often wanted, and that people would but be as good as their words upon such occasions: "O that there
" were such an heart in them, that they would fear
" me, and keep all my commandments always, that it
" might be well with them, and their children for ever!" For, 1st, It would be unspeakably agreeable to God; and, 2dly, Very profitable to yourselves.

1st, It would be exceedingly agreeable to God. One would think this very consideration of itself would have an influence upon us, to engage us to set about a thing which is so acceptable to the supreme being. Were there but a man for whom we had a profound regard and a high esteem, would not the consideration of a thing's being very agreeable to him strongly incline us to engage in it; especially if our omitting it would, to our certain knowledge, affect him with the utmost distaste and displeasure? Now, nothing can be more ac-

* 2 Pet. i. 10.; John, xvii. 11.

† Ibid.

‡ Ibid.

ceptable to God than our living conformable to the engagements formerly mentioned; and nothing is so displeasing and disagreeable to him as the contrary behaviour. And indeed, if the pleasure that our obedience gives him may be measured by the displeasure which he conceives at our disobedience, it must be very extraordinary; for, in expressing it, he condescends, in accommodation to our capacities, to put on very often the uneasiness of human passions. Witness that passionate exclamation in the text: "O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and their children for ever!"

2dly, This would be profitable to ourselves, And here I might shew you, that it would contribute, 1. to the perfection of our nature; 2. to the pleasure and comfort of our lives; 3. to the promoting even of our present temporal interests; 4. to our eternal happiness; and, lastly, that without it we shall perish to all eternity; but I chuse rather to save some time for a concluding word of application.

My brethren, The plain inference that arises from the two observations I have been endeavouring to illustrate is, That we must apply ourselves to the performance of those engagements we have entered into with all the pains and diligence we are capable of. If the thing were only difficult, and what we have great reason to suspect our want of success in, but at the same time were a matter of indifference, for which there was no great use or necessity, the consideration of its difficulty, and the little prospect there was of success, might indeed weaken our hands, and induce us to give over an attempt we were so liable to miscarry in. But can we look upon any thing in this light, concerning which God has expressed himself in the manner he does in the text: "O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!" When we consider, that the performance of our engagements is absolutely necessary

in order to please God, that our own interest entirely depends upon it, not only in this world, which is but a small matter, but that it is indispensably necessary in order to avoid eternal misery, and obtain eternal happiness; when we view the thing in this light, all the effect which the consideration of its difficulty should have upon us, is only to engage us to double our diligence, and be so much the more upon our guard. When, in such a case, we consider what hazard we run of mis-carrying, the only just inference is that of the apostle, "Therefore let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall."

I own I am extremely apt to think, that the greater number of professing Christians are in more danger of being ruined by security than by despair; but lest the representation I have given you of the probability that you will fall short of your duty, should have any bad effect upon your minds, by making your hearts to faint, and your hands to droop, at the prospect of these difficulties you have to surmount, I shall conclude with referring you to the following passages of scripture: "The way of the slothful man is as an hedge of thorns; but the way of the righteous is made plain;" Prov. xv. 19. "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous;" 1 John, v. 3. "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace;" Prov. iii. 17. "And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me;" 2 Cor. xii. 9. "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me;" Phil. iv. 13. "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us;" Rom. viii. 37. "Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world;" 1 John, iv. 4.

S E R M O N VII. *

TITUS, ii. 10.

Not purloining, but showing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.

THE sincere practice of religion has so much native loveliness in it, that it is the delight of the supreme being, the most perfect judge of goodness and beauty. Speaking of loving-kindness and righteousness, he says, Jer. ix. 24. "In these things do I delight." It is in order to promote the practice of these virtues, that revealed religion, with all its ordinances and institutions, is designed; and this, in particular, is the great design of that solemn ordinance which we were celebrating yesterday. What will it avail, think you, that you have eaten and drunk at the table of the Lord, if you be not thereby rendered holier and better men? and especially if you be not rendered more attentive to these relative duties recommended by the apostle, in the preceding part of the chapter where my text lies; duties which we have an opportunity to practise every day in common life, by reason of that intercourse which must be necessarily kept up between man and man? If, therefore, we shall depart from this place better masters and better servants, better fathers and better children, better husbands and better wives, in a word, better neighbours, and consequently better men, this, as it will be the greatest ornament of our profession, will also be the surest evidence of true Christianity, and the

* Preached on the Monday after celebrating the Sacrament.

most trying test of the power of godliness in our hearts and lives.

I have heard of a skilful artist, who was so expert in setting stones, that he could not only make false ones look like real ones, but could likewise, if he chose, disparage the finest by his manner of setting them. To apply this to our subject, religion, if I may be allowed to speak so, receives either a lustre or disparagement from our manner of setting it, i. e. from the lives and practices of its professors. As the greatest shame and reproach is brought on religion by the wicked lives of its professors; so the sincere and diligent practice of the duties it enjoins, and particularly of those mentioned above, is its greatest ornament and truest glory. So that, in allusion to some of Solomon's expressions, it may be said, in the one case, to be "like a jewel of gold in a swine's snout;" and, in the other, "like apples of gold in pictures of silver."

You have been making the most public and avowed profession of Christianity, as the religion in which you pretend to live, and would wish to die: Now, what can be more unsuitable to this, than to be afterwards found loading it with disgrace and shame, and exposing it to the reproach of those who may be the witnesses of your profession? What can be a nobler motive to diligence and carefulness in the practice of religion, than the consideration of this, that you will thereby prove ornaments to your profession, and contribute to put honour and credit on the doctrine of Jesus, to whom you are under so many and such important obligations?

It is possible that those who have conceived religion to lie chiefly in something else besides the due performance of the ordinary duties of common life, may look upon it as a dull entertainment, and below the dignity of this solemn occasion, to hear of being better masters, husbands, or neighbours; but we will find, by looking through the epistles, that there is scarcely a subject which the apostle is so large and so pressing upon as this. As he thought it his own duty to urge the practice of these upon them to whom he had occasion to write; so we find him, in this chapter, recommending

to Titus, who had the oversight of the churches of Crete, to insist much on the same subjects, as what well became sound doctrine. After having mentioned the different duties of several sorts of persons, he descends particularly to the duties of servants, and lays an injunction on Titus to exhort them, "That they be obedient to their own masters, and please them well in all things," &c. These are the duties which so great an apostle enjoins so great a pastor to press upon his flock. However mean they may be thought, and however slighted by some, yet they give a lustre to religion, and make it look beautiful and amiable. Therefore, after having delivered such a strict and particular charge concerning these duties, the apostle subjoins the reason why he would have him so instant in inculcating them upon his flock, "That they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things."

By God our Saviour here we are to understand the Lord Jesus Christ: for although God be a name common to all the persons of the Trinity, yet the addition of "our Saviour" confines it to the second person, who is God our Saviour in an especial manner, and in an especial manner the author of our religion: so that by "the doctrine of God our Saviour," we are to understand the gospel, which was the religion instituted by Jesus. This religion was professed by those servants, and others, over whom Titus had the charge; and therefore the apostle thought it a sufficient argument for engaging them to the practice of their duty, to tell them, that the holy religion which they had embraced would be thereby adorned and beautified.

IN discoursing to you upon this subject, I shall endeavour to show,

1st, How the practice of our duty contributes to the ornament of our holy religion; and, 2^{dly}, make some application of what may be said.

I. I AM to show, how the practice of our duty adorns our holy religion. And in order to illustrate this, it is to be observed, that ornaments serve for two uses: 1st, To cover the nakedness of those that wear them;

2dly, To beautify and set them off to the esteem and acceptance of others. Now a good life adorns the doctrine of Christ in both these ways.

1st, It covers the nakedness of religion, if I may be allowed the expression. It prevents that shame and reproach with which it would otherwise be loaded. I acknowledge, indeed, that the Christian religion is so pure and perfect, so beautiful and glorious, in itself, that if we examine it as it was delivered by its divine author, we will find no spots or blemishes that stand in need of covering. This doctrine is every way perfect and complete. There is nothing superfluous, nothing defective in it, but a perfect symmetry and harmony of parts, each of them lovely in itself, and all of them taken together mutually giving beauty to each other. And therefore, when I speak of hiding the blemishes, and covering the nakedness of it, you may assure yourselves, I do not mean, nor would I be understood to think, that there is any real blemish in itself. But however free from blemishes, I need not tell you, that there are some imputed to it by its enemies; and I wish I could not also tell you, that its professors have afforded too much reason for fixing these blemishes upon it, by living disagreeably to its dictates. Nothing has brought a greater discredit on Christianity than the behaviour of Christians themselves, who have frequently been a shame and reproach to their profession, and occasioned the holy name by which they are called to be blasphemed by their miscarriages. It is indeed no less hard than unjust, that the shame which a professed Christian brings upon himself should rebound to the religion which he professes, and that it should be bespattered with that filth in which he suffers himself to be plunged; but it is too notorious, that between its enemies on the one hand, and its hypocritical professors on the other, this is the treatment which religion commonly meets with: and it is as certain, that the only, at least the best, way to save it from these reproaches, is for us to live carefully up to its dictates.

In order to illustrate this a little farther, I shall give you these four instances of the shame and reproach which negligent or hypocritical professors have brought

upon religion: 1. From their wicked and ungodly lives, advantage has been taken by others to traduce it, as if it were nothing else than a cheat and a fable; 2. As if it gave indulgence to sin, and were not so high in its demands as is pretended; 3. As if the duties it enjoins were impracticable; or, 4. As if it were not really so comfortable and agreeable as it is given out to be. These are the reproaches of which the bad lives of Christians have caused their religion to be accused, and the stain of which we must wipe out by our pure and holy conversation.

1. It has been looked on as a cheat or a fable, for this plain reason, that those who are professed Christians do not seem to believe it themselves. "It is a mere sham," they say, "an imposition on the world. These people, indeed, pretend to believe the Christian religion, and are angry at us for not pretending so too; but let them pretend what they will, and say what they will, it is abundantly obvious, that they do not believe it themselves. Can it be imagined, that men who believe that there are exquisite and everlasting torments prepared for those who live in malice, lying, and covetous practices, in backbiting and evil speaking, or in drunkenness and uncleanness, would continue with so much indifference and composure in the practice of these crimes? Never tell us, that a man with his eyes open would put his hand into a place where he knew it would be burnt." Thus you see, O carnal professors! how your practice has given the gospel of Christ the lie! how it has made it pass for nothing else than a cheat or a fable! We have a remarkable instance of this in Rom. ii. 17. to which I refer you. Now, what can be a fouller reproach, what can be a greater disgrace to the Christian religion, than this? Is it nothing that the blessed Jesus, who came into the world that he might bear witness to the truth, should, through your miscarriages, be traduced as a cheat and an impostor? Is it nothing that these very truths to which you were yesterday setting your seal, should, in the course of your lives, be practically represented as incredible even by yourselves? Is it nothing that the glorious gospel, the contrivance of which

was the result of divine counsels, which was revealed to the world by the only Son of God, and which was sealed with the last drop of his precious blood, should be looked upon as a fabulous and idle story? Is there any real friend to Christianity, who can be an unconcerned bystander, and see it loaded with so much shame and disgrace?

Now, the best and most effectual way to remove this shame from it, and to rescue it from these reproaches, is to show the world by your lives, that you in reality believe it. If you would convince others, show them that you are really convinced yourselves. This, I assure you, will go a great way to recover the lost credit of our religion, and to persuade the rest of mankind, that there is something more in it than they at first apprehended. Numbers have a mighty influence upon the judgements of men; and one way to procure their assent to any thing, is to assure them, that it is believed by others. When we are told a story which we find meets with no credit, we will be apt to reject it, without any farther inquiry; whereas, if we find that it is pretty universally believed, this will be taken at least for a strong presumption in its favour, and will contribute much to make it pass with us likewise. If you would, therefore, be instrumental in restoring credit to the Christian religion, let it be seen by the holiness and strictness of your lives, that you indeed believe what you profess, and that you look upon it as the doctrine by which you are to be judged at the last day.

2. Christianity, by the bad lives of its professors, is thought to give indulgence to sin, and not to be so high in its demands as is pretended. It is certain, that the Christian religion is a holy religion, a doctrine according to godliness, and that it gives no countenance to vice or wickedness. But what can be thought by the profaner part of mankind when they compare the strict precepts of the gospel with the loose lives of its professors? What can they think when they consider, on the one hand, those assurances which scripture has given us, that without holiness no man shall see God, and that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God, and, on the other, are witnesses to the evil

conversation of those whose pretensions to the kingdom of God are founded on the same scriptures? What can they think, but that these solemn declarations, how loud soever they may sound, are yet to be taken with some allowances? They must think, that God deals with us as some merchants with their customers; that he asks high for heaven at first, but at the issue he will lower his demands, and let us have it at a much easier rate. I doubt not but the foul steps that have been sometimes made even by those who have trod the real path to heaven, such as David, Peter, &c. have made some conclude, that the road is not so clear as it is given out to be, never considering, that every false step these men made was in reality so much out of their way, never considering what toil it cost them to gain the right way again, and that while they were making these false steps, their back was turned on heaven. But if these irregular steps in the lives of good men have been of such fatal consequence to religion, what conclusion will be drawn by those who can trace your steps in any continued course of wandering, but that you have found an easier passage to heaven than by the strait gate and narrow way? They must conclude, that you know something in the Christian religion, which perhaps you are loath to divulge, which gives you a dispensation from the practice of that godliness you profess. And sure I am there cannot be a fouler stain fixed upon the Christian religion than this, a religion whose boast and glory, above all others, is its holiness and purity. Did Christ give himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works, and that he might save us from sins as well as from their punishment; and yet shall he be represented as conniving at them? Shall his religion be represented as allowing us to indulge our lusts, and as designed to save us without the mortification of parting with our iniquities? Is not this despoiling it of its noblest ornament, and defacing its greatest glory? If you would, therefore, restore its native loveliness, you must regulate your conduct in such a manner as may testify that you do not imagine Christ to be the minister of sin. You must show by your conver-

fation, that you look for no indulgence to your lusts from so holy a religion as that of Christianity; and thus you will deprive its enemies of every method to fix so black a stain upon it.

3. If wicked men are not induced, by the bad lives of Christians, to think our religion dispenses with them, they will be ready to conclude, that it is an impracticable and chimerical system, which has no existence but in the fancies of men. "You may talk, they say, of holiness and strictness, but still this is only talk. As for us, we do not pretend to it. And as for you who do, are not you as covetous and worldly minded, as passionate and proud, as malevolent and censorious, as many of your neighbours? Are you these meek and humble, these patient and self-denied, these charitable and forgiving persons, which your religion commands you to be? We grant, indeed, that Christianity contains a great many excellent rules and precepts, and we wish, for our own sakes, that you would observe them; but where is the man who lives up to them? You tell us of eternal rewards and punishments which are the sanctions of these laws; but give us one instance where they have been of any weight. You speak of omnipotent grace, which is able to subdue the most turbulent and unruly passions; but if you are indeed possessed of it, how often are your own passions an overmatch for it? By your own example, then, your laws, however good, appear to be impracticable; and it is as well to be under no laws at all, as under laws which it is impossible to keep."—Thus you see how the grace of God and the religion of Jesus may be wounded through your sides, if you lay them open to these thrusts. And what a reproach is it to Christianity, that after all the noise it has made, after all the blood, divine as well as human, that has been shed in confirmation of it, it should appear to be an institution altogether useless, because impracticable. Now this is a reproach that requires actions, and not words, to remove it. If you would have the Christian religion deemed good for any thing, if you would have the world convinced that it is a practicable system, you must show it by your own example. If you are satisfied, that a sincere obedience to the laws of Christ is not a chime-

rical supposition, why may not you be so many instances of it yourselves? This would effectually stop the mouths of gainfayers, and rescue Christianity from their reproaches.

4. But though the bad lives of professed Christians should not make religion appear quite impracticable, yet they will lead wicked men to think, that it is not so comfortable and agreeable as is pretended. We tell them, that "her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace;" that there is more "joy and gladness to be found therein than in the most abundant affluence of corn and wine;" and that "light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart." But is not all this practically denied by those who are every now and then stealing away to refresh themselves with the pleasures of sin? What can the men of the world conclude, but that religion is sour, morose, and comfortless, when they see those who have the highest pretensions to it beholden to wickedness and sin for all the pleasant hours they enjoy? Must they not conclude, that their own choice is best, and their own course of life preferable to a religious one? How natural soever the love of liberty may be, if we saw cattle breaking out from an inclosure, and overleaping the highest fences at the risk of their lives, in order to graze on a very indifferent common, would we not be ready to conclude, that they wanted pasturage within, or that these pastures wanted verdure and refreshment? In like manner, when wicked men behold the professors of Christianity, at the risk of no less than eternal life, breaking through those strong obligations which should confine them to the green pastures and the still waters of true religion, and perpetually straying into the barren common of sin and wickedness, will they not be ready to conclude, that it is for want of that pleasure and refreshment which religion is said to afford? What a sad disparagement is thus cast upon godliness? What an unamiable and disagreeable light is it hereby placed in to the world? What a frightful and forbidding aspect do you give it, making the fountain of living waters appear unable to bestow so much refreshment as the cisterns

which wicked men have hewn out, though they be broken cisterns that can hold no water.

If you would deliver Christianity from so false an imputation, if you would represent it to the world in a more lovely and inviting light, let it appear in the course of your lives, that you have so much comfort and satisfaction in the performance of your duty, and in the consolations of the Spirit, that you stand in no need of sinful pleasures to refresh you. Taste not their forbidden joys, and this will convince them, that you find the way you pretend to walk in sufficiently pleasant and agreeable.

Thus I have shewn you, that the sincere practice of our duty will contribute to adorn religion in respect of the first use of ornaments, which is to cover blemishes. As the irregular lives of professed Christians have wounded the honour of Christianity, and stained it with the most unseemly blots, so it is their good lives alone which can heal these wounds, wash out these stains, and recover it to its native health and beauty.

2dly, Another use of ornaments is to beautify the person that wears them, and set him off to the esteem and acceptance of others. In this respect, likewise, an holy practice and conversation adorns religion wonderfully, and contributes to recommend it to the esteem and acceptance of others.

1. They give life and spirit to it, and thereby light up its beauties, as the returning spirit would do to a body that was lying dead. A dead body has the same wonderful harmony of parts, and admirable contrivance which we observe in a living one; but then the animating soul has left it; it is a ghastly spectacle, and more an object of terror than of pleasure to the beholder. In like manner, when an holy practice is removed from Christianity, I may say the soul of it is departed; the mere external profession is but a lifeless carcase, which is loathsome and disagreeable. Even the completest system of it, considered in itself, is but a dead letter, without those alluring charms which it hath when the practice of Christians gives it life and spirit. The severity of its rules would scare men from embracing it, till they

see the beauty of holiness in the practice and good example of others. This leads me to observe,

2. That the sincere practice of religion will make its beauties be remarked, and its usefulness felt by the world. Although an object be highly ornamented, yet if it be concealed in a dark corner, its beauty is lost; whereas if it were exposed to public view, its beauties will become conspicuous, and will be discerned by the world. Now the Christian religion is abundantly beautiful in itself; it wants only to be seen in order to be admired. But without the practice of its duties, it is concealed from the eyes of the world. Its beauties are seen by few, and its usefulness felt by none; whereas if its practice were as extensive as its profession, its charms would be most irresistibly alluring. Mankind would see so much of its excellency, and feel so much of its benefit and usefulness, that a savage heart alone would fail to be enamoured with it.

This would appear more sensibly if I had time to go through the several virtues which ought to shine most eminently in the practice of a Christian; but I shall only observe in the general, that the whole of our duty may be comprehended in love, which, with all its fruits, every one must acknowledge to be a beautiful and amiable quality. Look to the list which the apostle gives of the fruits of the spirit, Gal. v. 22, 23. "They are love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance." See likewise what he says elsewhere. "Put on therefore (as the elect of God, holy and beloved) bowels of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long suffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, and above all these things, put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness." Let us suppose, (alas! that it should be only a supposition), that all who profess the Christian religion were endued with that universal charity which the gospel requires, were as meek and humble, as patient and forgiving, in a word, as charitable to all, as our religion commands us to be: if this were the case, who could avoid admiring the incomparable beauty of such a religion? Would not its excellency appear with such irresistible charms as to cap-

tivate the eyes of the world by its amiable lustre and glorious splendour? The practice of these virtues could not fail to recommend it to the esteem and acceptance of all. Hence they are termed by the Apostle Paul, Phil. iv. 8. "things of good report." "Let it be the hidden man of the heart," says another apostle, 1 Pet. iii. 4. "in that, which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price."

I COME now to conclude this discourse with some application of what has been said.

Let us seriously take a view of the present lamentable and declining state of our religion, and compare it with its flourishing state a little after it was published to the world. Then this doctrine of God our Saviour, though under a persecution, gained more nations and countries to its faith than it can now gain of individuals, though, with respect to worldly advantages, it is flourishing and safe. Then all the powers of the world, and all the learning of philosophers, were not able to clog its wings, or stop its progress; now the same powers and the same learning cannot hinder it from losing ground: then it was like a raging flame driven by the wind over combustible countries; now we find it burning with so faint and dim a light, that although the waters of persecution, instead of extinguishing it, only made it blaze the fiercer, yet the smallest blast of infidel breath is able almost to annihilate the expiring flame; then it was like a river overflowing all its banks, and rushing with a current so impetuous as to bear every thing down before it; now it is reduced to a little purling stream, which would hardly be noticed but for its murmuring noise. What can be the reason of this prodigious change? Has this doctrine undergone any alteration? Is it not the same it was then? That it is not, might have been alledged in the times of Popish darkness; but now it is again reduced to the ancient standard of the scripture. Have the evidences of its truth become weak through length of time? So far from it, that some of them are by this circumstance rather corroborated. Have these evidences not been sufficiently represented to the world?

Never was there an age that beheld them set in a clearer or stronger light. What is it then that has produced this wonderful difference? Methinks, my brethren, it need not cost us a very laborious inquiry to find it out. It lies too much in ourselves to be far to seek. Yes, my brethren, it is to the lives of Christians that all this is to be imputed. This, this alone, has reduced the Christian religion from such a fair and flourishing to such a low and languishing state. It is this which has spoiled her beauty, and defaced her glory; this which has pulled her down from her triumphal chariot, in which she traversed the earth like a victorious conqueror, to be trodden under foot by men. In former days, Christianity was beautified and adorned by the good conversation of its professors; now it is sullied and defiled by their wicked practices. Then were Christians distinguished by the holiness of their lives, as well as the purity of their doctrines; now they are distinguished by an uncharitable, and consequently an ineffectual, contention for those truths, which, as they do not practise, so they do not seem to believe. Then was universal charity and brotherly love the badge of a Christian. "See how these Christians love one another," was the common observation of their Heathen neighbours. And "they were known by all men to be Christ's disciples, because they loved one another." Then the amiable example of their master was copied out in the lives of his true disciples, who were meek as lambs, and harmless as doves. Is it any wonder that such a religion, adorned in such a manner, became the delight and admiration of the world? Look but to the close of the 2d and 4th chapters of the Acts, and you will see what an influence these things had upon all that beheld them. When "the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul, neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; when they had all things in common, so that none lacked, distribution being made to every man according as he had need." Whereas now variance and strife, contentions and divisions, have obtained so much among those who are called Christians, that one would be apt to think they understood our Saviour to have

said, "Hereby shall I know you to be my disciples, if ye hate one another;" or as if they had understood that melancholy and pathetic prophecy to be indeed a declaration of his real design, "Think you I am come to send peace on earth? nay, I tell you, but rather division."

But are these men who are thus employed in tearing to pieces the beautiful ornaments of the Christian religion, are these men real Christians? No, my brethren, they are not. The chief difference between the primitive and present times is, that then there were none, or at least few, who professed themselves to be Christians, but such as were really so; whereas now almost every individual, with all his unmortified lusts and passions, is called by the Christian name, while, at the same time, there are but few who are Christians indeed. Far be it from us to imagine, that they whose wicked lives are a continued contradiction to the gospel are Christians. Whatever their profession and pretences may be, though they have eaten and drunk at his table, yet "it is not every one that saith, Lord, Lord, that shall enter in to the kingdom of heaven." O ye carnal, ye hypocritical professors! ye that are Christians in name, but not in deed! are ye sensible of the mischief ye have done to religion? Do ye know that the decaying state of Christianity is what ye have to answer for? As ye have contributed to the downfall of this beautiful fabric, so the ruins of it will light upon your own unhappy heads. Ye seem to have mixed yourselves with the armies of Israel, on purpose to break their beautiful order, and leave them in confusion. Either live, I beseech you, as becometh Christians, or cease to be called so. If ye have any regard for that religion which ye would be thought to have embraced, if ye have any regard for your immortal souls, let me obtest you to have a conversation more becoming the gospel of Christ.

Would to God, my brethren, there were none, even among true and sincere Christians, who deserve any share of the blame! But you all know it cannot be dissembled, that the honour of our religion lies bleeding beneath the wounds which at one time or other it

has received from the hands of all of us. In order, therefore, to excite you to a greater diligence in adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour, by a conversation becoming the gospel, there are a few motives or arguments which I meant to have insisted upon; but lest I tire you, I shall only name them.

1st, Consider that this is the doctrine of that God who is your Saviour, and whose sufferings you were yesterday commemorating; sufferings which lay you under the strongest obligations to contribute what you can for recommending him and his religion.

2dly, Consider that this is your own religion; that doctrine of which you were yesterday making the most solemn and public profession. If it be reasonable to profess it, is it not likewise reasonable to live agreeable to it? If you would vindicate your own conduct, it behoves you to give as much lustre and reputation to the religion you profess as you can. This is only like ornamenting and adorning the cloaths which you yourselves are to wear.

3dly, Consider that there is no way left to redeem and vindicate the lost credit of your religion, but a life suitable to its precepts. You may yet show the profane world, that even in this languishing state of religion, it has still so much beauty and brilliancy as to dazzle even those who look upon it with the most malicious eyes.

4thly, This is the way to promote the conversion and salvation of others; an object which you must attend to by the particular command of Christ, as well as by the nature of that universal charity which your religion inculcates.

5thly, Consider that your unholy lives contribute much to harden the hearts of the wicked, who will be ready to bless themselves in their own courses, when they see them countenanced by your practice.

Lastly, Consider, if ye adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour, it will for ever adorn you in this world: "Them that honour me, (saith the Lord *), I will ho-

* 1 Sam. ii. 30.

"nour, and they that despise me, shall be lightly esteemed." It will likewise adorn you in the next : "Whosoever shall confess me before men, (says our Saviour), him will I confess before the angels in heaven."

S E R M O N VIII.

2 Peter, i. 10.

Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure : for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.

AS the salvation of our immortal souls is, without all controversy, an affair of the highest moment ; so it certainly ought to be the great business of every sinner to exert himself strenuously, and give the most unwearyed diligence, in order to secure this important point. And indeed, were it not contradicted by so universal an experience, one would be apt to think, that there is no necessity for urging people to it, as long as their own interest is so nearly concerned. The greatest number of mankind among us are well informed, and I have the charity to suppose they really believe, that immediately after their dissolution they will enter into a state either of eternal happiness or eternal misery ; — matters, I am sure, of no trivial consideration. They generally profess to be convinced of the frailty and uncertainty of life ; and that no body knows how soon the one of these states or the other may be their portion. Now, when the case is so, would not one be ready to imagine, that if there was a possibility, by the most indefatigable diligence, to arrive at any certainty about our future state, the generality of people would give themselves no rest till they had acquired it ? And yet what can be more evident, than that the bulk of professed Christians look upon assurance as an attainment of too high a nature for them to aim at ? And, what is still worse, do

we not see that they hardly ever pass a thought on the subject? They are not only uncertain about the state of their souls, but they seem to be pretty easy under their uncertainty. It is therefore my purpose, at this time, to endeavour, if possible, to rouse and awaken the indolent and slothful part of my hearers from that fatal lethargy which is so universal and so dangerous a disease among us, and to persuade them to be at greater pains, and apply with greater diligence to those things which concern their eternal peace. And for this end, I have pitched upon these words of the Apostle Peter: “Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.”

The apostle having, in the beginning of this chapter, set forth the grace of the gospel, whereby are given unto us such exceeding great and precious promises, takes occasion from thence to rouse those believers to whom he writes to an unwearied diligence in making large advances in sanctification and holiness: “And besides this, (or as it may be rendered from the original), on this account, giving all diligence to add to your faith virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity*,” and thus their faith would not be barren and unfruitful: “For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ †.” But he tells them, in the next verse, that he who wants these qualifications, however high his pretences may be, has vain pretences, and a vain faith: “But he that lacketh these things, is blind, and cannot see far off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins ‡.” And therefore he comes, in the verse I have now read, earnestly to exhort them to a strenuous and diligent practice of religion, that their interest in Jesus Christ may be put beyond all doubt.

* 2 Peter i. 5. † Vers. 8. ‡ Vers. 9.

In the apostle's words, we may take notice of these circumstances.

1st, The connection of this exhortation with the preceding verse: *Wherefore, &c.*; as if he had said, "Seeing, then, that there are such glorious promises in the gospel, whereby you may even become partakers of the divine nature; and seeing it is only the practice of these Christian virtues which I have recommended, faith, temperance, godliness, and charity, that can give you a title to them, or make your interest in them appear either to God, your neighbour, or yourself; and seeing the want of these virtuous qualifications is a plain symptom that you are none of those who have any claim to the promises of the gospel; — seeing this is the case, rather than fall so miserably short, rather than be found among the number of those who are destitute of the Christian virtues, exert yourselves with new vigour, and, like one who is in danger of losing a race, strain with redoubled efforts for the glorious prize." We may likewise observe the appellation of *brethren*, by which the apostle addresses those to whom he writes. They were indeed, not only brethren by nature, being sprung from the same stock of Abraham, but they were also brethren by grace; for he directs his epistle, "To them who have obtained like precious faith with us, through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ *." From this it appears, that it is not only unregenerated sinners who are here exhorted to diligence, in order to attain an interest in Christ, but even those who have already attained it. They must continue to exert themselves with diligence in making their calling and election sure; and those virtues that were formerly mentioned must not only be in them, but must abound more and more, that they may neither be barren nor unfruitful.

2^{dly}, We may take notice of the duty they are exhorted to, viz. "to make their calling and election sure;" or to attain a well-grounded assurance of this,

* Vers. 1.

that they are effectually called and chosen of God. There can be no other meaning affixed to this phrase; for our calling and election being acts of God, and not of our own, we cannot be said to make them sure in any other way, but by attaining the assurance that we are called and chosen. The Lord always knoweth who are his. This, therefore, has plainly a reference to us, who must discover the cause by its effects, and arrive at the assurance of our calling and election by their genuine fruits, viz. faith and good works.

3dly, We may observe the measure of this duty that is inculcated. We must not only endeavour to reach this assurance, but we must give diligence to it; nay, we are commanded (vers. 5.) to give all diligence to it. The expression, *Besides this*, likewise implies, that it is a business we must pursue with the highest degree of application. It must be the chief and principal object of our care, and all our endeavours must be animated with diligence and zeal. The assurance of God's love is a privilege of so high a nature, that although no Christian should be prevented from seeking after it, yet it is not to be attained by faint endeavours and languid efforts, but is the peculiar reward of the laborious and diligent Christian.

4thly, We have an encouragement to rouse us to diligence, contained in these words: "If ye do these things, ye shall never fall." If ye make conscience of the practice of these virtues, and adhere to them with diligence, ye shall never fall. This is a metaphor taken from a race, where the runners, if they are not vigilant, may happen to be overturned, and before they can recover themselves, must lose much of the ground. Against the fears of this, the apostle arms the diligent Christian. He shall not fall either into final and total defection, nor even into those sad miscarriages which good men themselves are sometimes obnoxious to, but he shall go on smoothly, and without interruption, in his Christian course, and an entrance shall be ministered to him abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

I MEAN now to illustrate the two following doctrines.

1st, That a Christian, in the practice of religion, should not satisfy himself with faint and languid efforts, but should exert himself with the greatest diligence and application.

2^{dly}, That we ought not only to endeavour to attain an interest in Christ, but that we should never rest till we have arrived at a certainty thereof.

I. MY brethren, if we take a view of the present state and circumstances of religion in the world, we will find that the character of the slothful Christian is most prevalent. Where-ever we cast our eyes, we will neither see the bulk of men eminent for their piety, nor avowedly profane and impious. This last character, indeed, is by far too common, and obtains more universally than one would imagine who considers the folly of it. But however frequent it may be, this is not the most ordinary way in which people ruin themselves. The greatest number of souls are cheated out of happiness, and decoyed, as it were, to the pit by a middle way. There are few, in comparison, who renounce religion entirely, who declare for wickedness, and bid open defiance to the Almighty. The generality of people wish to be saved; they even do something for this purpose; but that something is not the hundredth part of what they ought to do. Although they never lose the hopes of salvation, yet their desires after it are but faint, and their endeavours languid and imperfect; and although they may not seem to be quite so bad as the openly profane and irreligious, yet as the slothful man is brother to him that is a great waster, so these lukewarm Christians are as hateful in the sight of God, as if they had no religion at all. The church of Laodicea appears to have been much of this temper: "I would, (says our Saviour), thou wert either cold or hot; but because thou art lukewarm, I will reject thee with the greatest contempt and abhorrence." Now, because this is such a common and ordinary road to perdition, and because it is a temper that so universally prevails among Christians, I shall endeavour to excite you and myself

to the practice of religion in such a manner as to prevent us from fainting by the way. And in order to this, I shall observe the following method.

1st, I shall explain the nature of this diligence, and shew you what it is I am to exhort you to; *2dly*, I shall enforce it by some arguments, and shew you what obligations we are under to this fervour in religion; *3dly*, I shall inquire into the causes why it is so rarely found, and endeavour to point out the best remedies against the hindrances of it.

I. FIRST, then, I am to unfold the nature of this duty, or rather of this disposition, which ought to be the spirit and life that should run through the whole of our religious duties.

1st, If we would be diligent in religion, we must apply ourselves to it immediately. A man who is diligent in his business never neglects the proper season for acting, nor puts off his time needlessly, without doing any thing to the purpose. Now, every time is the proper season for religion; and whoever delays the applying himself to a religious course of life one day, one hour, or one minute, is a careless sinner, and culpably negligent of his most important interests. Felix, when he found the Apostle Paul somewhat hard upon his conscience, by his eloquent reasoning on the important subjects of righteousness, temperance, and judgement to come, did not wholly condemn what his prisoner said. He trembled; but he put off the consideration of it till another opportunity. This was a fly, but effectual, method taken by the enemy of mankind to prevent his conversion. Whoever would be diligent in religion must look upon the present moment as "the accepted time, and the day of salvation;" and we must "exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day, lest any of us be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."

2dly, If we would be diligent in religion, we must make it our stated and ordinary business, and set about it as the chief and principal design of our lives. Solomon tells us, that "wisdom is the principal thing: therefore get wisdom; and with all thy getting, get un-

“derstanding*.” We cannot be said to give all diligence to religion, if it do not possess a place in our hearts some way proportionable to its importance. Now, as it is of infinitely greater consequence to obtain the favour of God, than to procure any other acquisition, so we must give it the preference to every thing else, and apply ourselves chiefly to this as the one thing needful: “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you †.” How common is it in the world, for people to mind religion as it were a secondary thing; and to think of serving God, and taking care of their souls, only provided they have no other business to employ them. Our Saviour represents this to us by the parable of the supper ‡. Those who were bidden made various excuses; one had bought a piece of ground, and must go to see it; another had bought five yoke of oxen, and must go to prove them. The fault here was this, that they gave any thing the preference to the invitation they had received, and did not look upon it as what ought to be complied with in the first place. Thus he proceeds to tell us, “If any man hate not his father and mother, his wife and children, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple §.” By hating is here meant, that a man’s love to his relatives should not come in competition with his love to Christ, as he himself elsewhere explains it: “He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me **” Whoever, then, would approve himself a diligent Christian, must prefer the interest of his soul to every thing else, and must look upon religion as the principal business of his life.

3dly, If we would be diligent in religion, we must not only apply ourselves to it immediately, and make it the chief business of our lives, but we must exert ourselves in the application with the warmest fervour of spirit. I do not mean such a fervour as arises from the excess of natural passion. I own there may be an indiscreet zeal and vehemence in religion. The Apostle Paul ac-

* Prov. iv. 7.

‡ Vers. 26.

† Matth. vi. 33.

** Matth. x. 37.

‡ Luke, xiv. 16.

knowledges this, when he says of the Jews, that “ they “ had a zeal of God, but not according to know- “ ledge *.” Some people have so much keenness in their temper, that they may seem to excel others who are of a different constitution. But there is an easy rule whereby this indiscreet zeal may be discovered, viz. that it commonly makes us more concerned about the principles and practice of others than about our own. There is, however, a fervour and zeal in religion which every man ought to be possessed of, and which we cannot exceed in. This consists in such a sense of the importance of salvation, as excites us to labour for it with all our might : “ It is good,” says the apostle, “ to be “ zealously affected always in a good thing †.” Now, religion is such a good thing, that whoever has a due impression of its value and importance, can never engage in it with coldness or unconcern : “ We ought to cry “ after knowledge,” says the wise man, “ and lift up “ our voices for understanding :” we must seek for her as “ silver, and search for her as for hid treasures.” We find this temper recommended in scripture, in opposition to slothfulness. Thus, when our Saviour had reproved the church of Laodicea for her coldness, he adds, “ Be zealous, therefore, and repent ‡.” “ Be not “ slothful in business,” says the Apostle Paul writing to the Romans, “ but fervent in spirit, serving the Lord §.” Our Saviour tells us, that “ the kingdom of heaven “ suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force **.” To illustrate this, we have a remarkable parable of an importunate widow, who was so incessant and unwearyed in her solicitations, that although the unjust judge did not mind her at first, yet he is at length represented as saying within himself, “ Though I fear not God, nor “ regard men, yet because this widow troubleth me, I “ will avenge her ††.” And this parable, we are told, was delivered to teach men always to pray, and not to faint. To conclude this particular, let us remember, that Christ suffered, not only to “ redeem us from all

* Rom. x. 2.

† Rom. xii. 11.

‡ Gal. iv. 18.

** Matth. xi. 12.

‡ Rev. iii. 9.

†† Luke, xviii. 1.

“ iniquity, but that he might purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.”

Thus far, in general, concerning the nature of this disposition. It should be more particularly exerted, in a careful and diligent use of all the ordinary means of God's appointment; in a punctual attendance on public ordinances; in reading the scriptures with due attention, being instant in prayer, and frequent in meditation. These are the common means by which grace is either planted in the soul of a sinner, or kept alive, and preserved in vigour, in the soul of a believer; and therefore the neglect of them is absolutely inconsistent with a Christian diligence. It is only the man whose delight is in the law of God, and who meditates on his law day and night, that shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water. It is only those that ask, to whom it shall be given; those that seek, who shall find; and those that knock, to whom it shall be opened. We find the Psalmist panting vehemently after the public ordinances of religion: “ My soul longeth, yea even fainteth, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God *.” In the same psalm, we have a beautiful description of the chearfulness with which those who lived at a distance from public worship underwent the bodily fatigue they were obliged to suffer in order to attend on it: “ Who passing through the valley of Baca, make it a well: the rain also filleth the pools †.” This is a description of such as living remote from Jerusalem, yet out of love to the temple-worship, travelled chearfully through the dry and desert valley of Baca, as if it had been plentifully furnished with wells for their refreshment. Happy they who so love the house of God, or his ordinances, as to encounter difficulties, rather than omit the attendance of them! But we must always remember, that we ought not only to be careful in our attendance upon them, but also in our performance of them. A careless temper of mind in the use of appointed means renders them ineffectual for the end they were designed to serve. Good men are sensible, that it is no easy mat-

* Ps. lxxxiv. 2.

† Vers. 6.

ter to secure their thoughts from wandering, and to raise or support pious and devout affections. They find by experience, that they stand much in need of care and conflict, pains and application, in order to discharge their duties with advantage. And certainly if we consider them as the means of our salvation, we will not think these pains unnecessary, without which they cannot be spiritual sacrifices, either acceptable to God, or profitable to ourselves.

This holy diligence should be exerted at our first entrance on a religious course of life, by endeavouring to begin well, and lay a good foundation. What the apostle says concerning the instruction of believers in the Christian faith, may be applied to this purpose: "Let us go on," says he, "to perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and faith towards God *." We should endeavour to lay the foundation so well at the beginning, as that we may not find occasion afterwards to go over the same piece of work again. We must not satisfy ourselves with a slight and general repentance, by which, I am afraid, too many people deceive themselves. When they find their hearts, in any measure, sorrowfully affected for their sins, or rather for the prospect they have of the dismal consequences thereof, they are apt to take this for a complete and sufficient repentance, But their wounds are then only skinned over, and will be perpetually breaking out anew. They are saying, Peace, peace, when there is no peace. We must endeavour, therefore, not to be negligent in our repentance, but to gain such a sense of the number and aggravated nature of our sins, as may affect our hearts with a deep and piercing sorrow for them, attended with a hearty hatred of them, and an unfeigned forsaking of them.

Another part of the foundation we must lay, is faith in Jesus Christ. This being the chief and principal hinge upon which the whole of our salvation turns, we must exert our utmost diligence in laying this part of the foundation well; for if we do not, whatever is built

* Heb. vi. 1.

upon it will be like a house founded on sand, and will never be able to endure the blasts of temptation and the storms of difficulty which we must expect to meet with in our Christian course. There is a false faith, as well as a false repentance, by which the careless and unwary Christian may easily be imposed upon; and therefore it is here that we must spare no pains, but give all the application we are capable of to be rooted and grounded, fixed and united to Jesus Christ by a strong and lively faith. We must give the fullest consent to the gospel offer of Christ, and accept of him with our whole hearts, as Prophet, Priest, and King. And, finally, seeing the foundation of religion must likewise be laid by a fixed and unalterable resolution to persevere in a course of sincere obedience to all the precepts and commandments of God, here also must all the fervour and vehemence of our spirits be exerted. It is no uncommon thing for indolent and careless Christians to deceive themselves in this respect, by faint and languid resolves on a holier and better life, which prove too frequently like Sampson's green withs, that upon the first opportunity were snapt asunder, as a thread of tow is broken when it toucheth the fire. Therefore we can never be too careful in binding ourselves strictly, and entering into the strongest resolutions, through the grace of God, to walk no more in the paths of unrighteousness. We ought to imitate the noble example of the Psalmist David, and adopt his resolution, "I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgements *."

This foundation being laid, Christian diligence must also be continued by those who have fairly begun the practice of religion. It must be exerted in a cautious and watchful conversation, in a constant opposition to our spiritual enemies, and in surmounting all the difficulties which lie in our way. As we must enter upon religion with a prospect of difficulties, and a fixed resolution to adhere to God in defiance of them all, so we will never be able to maintain our ground, and acquit ourselves well, without diligence and labour. We have

* Ps. cxix. 106.

foes to grapple with that will be altogether invincible, unless we have some measure of this holy vigour and activity. As the spiritual adversaries of our salvation are numerous, so they are strong and powerful, and are not to be overcome by faint and feeble efforts. This is represented to us by the apostle in the following words, where he not only gives us the reason, but explains the nature of this diligence, by enumerating the particulars of it: "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places *." We must always be resisting the devil in his known attacks, and the world in its ensnaring influences. We must be endeavouring to subdue the corrupt lusts and inclinations of our own deceitful hearts. We must walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, that we may not be surprised in an unguarded hour by those cunning adversaries, who lie ready to catch every advantage against us, and know how to improve it with the greatest dexterity. "Be vigilant," says the Apostle Peter, "because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour †." Our Saviour likewise recommends the exercise of holy diligence: "Watch ye therefore, for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cock crowing, or in the morning, lest coming suddenly, he find you sleeping ‡."

This holy diligence must likewise be exerted in making continual advances unto the perfect day. We must never rest satisfied with any degree of holiness that we have already attained, but must still be going on towards perfection, and aspiring after higher and higher measures of sanctification. The path of the just must be like the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day; and therefore there is none, how far soever they are advanced in the ways of religion, who may give up this fervent and unwearied diligence. Even the Apostle Paul did "not count himself to have apprehended: but this one thing," says he, "I do, for-

* Eph. vi. 12.

† 1 Pet. v. 8.

‡ Mark, xiii. 35.

“getting the things that are behind, I press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus *.” As long then as we are imperfect, and the best of Christians will always find themselves to be so on this side the grave, we must never slacken our diligence, but imitate the noble example of this apostle, who bounded himself with nothing short of the resurrection of the dead.

Thus have I endeavoured to give you a view of this holy diligence, which we have found in general to consist in applying to religion immediately, in making it our stated and ordinary business, in exerting ourselves therein with the greatest vehemence and fervour of spirit; and I have endeavoured to show you how it must be more particularly exerted, viz. in a careful use of all the ordinary means of God’s appointment, in laying a solid foundation of repentance, faith, and resolutions of new obedience; in making a constant opposition to all our spiritual enemies, and the difficulties that we will meet with in our Christian course; and, lastly, in making continual advances towards perfection.

I proceed now,

II. To enforce the practice of this duty by a few arguments, and show you the obligations we are under to this holy fervour and diligence in religion. And,

1st, We find it expressly commanded by God in various passages of scripture. Three times in the course of this epistle the apostle insists upon this exhortation, viz. in vers. 5. of this chapter, in our text, and in chap. 3. vers. 14. “Thou hast commanded us,” says the Psalmist, “to keep thy precepts diligently †.” We find a similar advice given by Moses: “Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently ‡.” To the same purpose are the words of Solomon: “Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life §.” We are commanded by our Saviour to labour for heaven: “Strive to enter in at the strait gate **.” And again, “Labour not for the meat which perisheth,

* Phil. iii. 13.

† Psal. cxix. 4.

‡ Deut. iv. 9.

§ Prov. iv. 23.

** Luke, xiii. 24.

“but for that which endureth to everlasting life*.” A religious life is always compared to the most laborious exercises. It is compared to the heat of a battle: “Fight the good fight of faith†.” To the toil of a race: “So run that ye may obtain‡.” The apostle exhorts us, “to lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, that we may run with patience the race set before us||.” We are particularly cautioned against that indolence and sloth, which is the reverse of this disposition, in the following words. “And we desire, that every one of you show the same diligence, to the full assurance of hope unto the end: that ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience are now inheriting the promises**.” After so many express commands to be diligent, can we think that faint and feeble efforts will ever be sufficient for the salvation of our souls? Can we expect to be conveyed to heaven, and transported to the mansions of the blessed, in a bed of down, without any labour or trouble to ourselves? Let us beware of flattering ourselves with so mistaken an apprehension. It is indeed an easy matter to travel in the broad and beaten path that leads to destruction; but the way to heaven is so narrow, and the gate so strait, that there is no admittance to be found without pressing and striving. We are told, that they who come to God “must believe that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him††.” So that they alone “who diligently seek him” shall be rewarded. We must not think that a bare profession, a mere external Pharisaical religion, will bring us to heaven; but we must exert ourselves with some measure of holy vigour in the necessary duties of a good life, if we be really in earnest, and expect ever to be admitted into the favour of God, and find admittance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour. Indeed, if we consider the greatness of that being with whom we have to do, we may easily be convinced, that it is not faint endeavours and languishing efforts that he will be pleased with, or accept

* John, vi. 27.

|| Heb. xiii. 1.

† 1 Tim. vi. 12.

** Heb. vi. 11. 12.

‡ 1 Cor. ix. 24.

†† Heb. xi. 6.

at our hands. He is not a being that will be mocked and trifled with. Even a person of infinitely smaller consequence would be displeased with the slothful services which we frequently presume to offer to the great God of all.

2dly, The reasonableness and necessity of this holy diligence will farther appear, if we consider that religion is the most important affair we can possibly be engaged in. If indeed religion was a trifle, if it could be of no considerable consequence whether we were in the favour of God or not, if we had other affairs on our hands that were plainly of greater weight and moment, I confess it might seem a little preposterous to urge you so much to activity and fervour in the pursuit of it; and some apology might be admitted for being incumbered about many things to the neglect of this. But is not the case very different? Is not this the one thing needful, in comparison with which every thing else is a mere trifle? Hear what our Saviour says on this subject: "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" The putting it in the form of a question is a method of expression that has a great strength and emphasis. An appeal is made to every one's reflection, whether he can name any object of such mighty consequence as the salvation of our souls. Which of all our temporal interests is it that may come in competition with this? Is it the amassing of gold and silver, which will either make itself wings and fly away, or will be forsaken by us in a few days or years? Is it the aspiring after those fading airy honours that form some distinction among men for a few moments of their existence, but in a little time will be eternally levelled by the grave? Is it the pursuing after the vain and transitory pleasures which are to be found in the gratification of our carnal appetites? Are any of these to be compared with our eternal state, where the felicity on the one hand, and the torment on the other, are superlatively exquisite? Eternal happiness or eternal misery! Though there was nothing more, the

* Matth. xvi. 26.

very mention of eternity carries such an idea of importance along with it, as might be sufficient to command our attention, and engross the whole of our care. We ought to proportion our diligence, activity, and solicitude, to the value and importance of the subjects about which they are employed. As it would be foolish and unreasonable to express the utmost concern about a trifle, so it is the part of a wise man to exert himself most where most is in danger. Now here is a case where our all is at stake. What unwearied endeavours then, what indefatigable diligence, does not the practice of religion call for? Our Saviour tells us, that "the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant seeking goodly pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all he had, and bought it *." If religion, then, be that one thing needful, which is of the last importance; if, in comparison with it, every thing else be trifling; if it be that upon which our eternal happiness or eternal misery depends, it behoves us to exert ourselves with the greatest activity and vigour, and to give all diligence to make our calling and election sure.

3dly, The necessity of this holy diligence will farther appear, if we consider the difficulties we have to grapple with. If we consider the nature of these duties which religion commands us to discharge, we will find, that they are so directly opposite to the natural inclinations of our hearts, that, in order to perform them, more labour and stronger efforts are required than the world is apt to imagine. By nature we are strongly addicted to an irregular and immoderate love of ourselves, to place our happiness in sensual and earthly enjoyments, and to seek after riches, greatness, and carnal pleasures. But which of these corrupt inclinations must we not oppose and subdue in fulfilling the duties of religion and charity? In order to be the true disciples of Christ, we must renounce ourselves, and all the tempting pleasures of an ensnaring world; we must mortify our members, and crucify our flesh. "Whosoever he be of you," says our Saviour, "that forsaketh not all he hath, he

* Matth. xiii. 45.

"cannot be my disciple." Now is this such an easy matter as to be performed without any application or diligence? Is it possible to do it without making the strongest efforts? What are all the graces and virtues which ought to be the daily exercise of a good man, but such as cannot be practised without laborious endeavours, in concurrence with the grace of God? Faith, hope, charity, humility, in a word, all the duties of a Christian, have something contrary to them in the heart of man. What must we believe but things of which we have no evidence from sense? "Faith," says the apostle, "is the substance of things not seen *;" mysteries too sublime to be sufficiently comprehended by us, and which our carnal reason is apt to deny. We must hope, but it is for things which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor heart conceived. We must love, but our love is to be directed to a being whom we never saw; and the difficulty of this is represented by the Apostle John: "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen †?" We must likewise love our enemies, even those who hate and persecute us. And are these things so easy as to be accomplished without bestirring ourselves to purpose? To these difficulties, that grow out of the duties themselves which are prescribed to us, if we add the dreadful obstacles that are laid in our way by the devil and the world, it may farther convince us of the necessity of diligence. The scripture apprises us sufficiently of the danger we are in from these wicked spirits, whose inveterate malice against us, and hatred of God and holiness, prompt them to the most unwearied endeavours in tempting us to sin, and whose natural subtilty and long practice in this malignant work, render them expert in the art of ruining souls. Now against these principalities and powers we must prepare to combat; and if we do not use all imaginable caution and circumspection, and resist the tempter with all the efforts we are capable of, he will gain an easy victory over us. He is not ignorant of our weak side, or the quarter where we may be most easily assailed. He knows how to catch the

* Heb. xi. 1.

† 1 John, iv. 20.

properest season, and time his temptations most opportunely. He will not fail to attack us when we are least aware, and on a quarter where we are least apprehensive. It is not one repulse or two that will put him to flight; but he will renew his attacks with the most unwearied obstinacy, if he do not find us impreguably resolute. And is it feeble endeavours, do we think, or careless and negligent efforts, that will be sufficient to defend us against such powerful adversaries? Do not these things require the utmost diligence, and the most unwearied application? But farther, it is not these wicked spirits alone that we have to guard against. We have as much cause of fear from the world as from the devil. All that we love, all that we fear in this world, and consequently every thing without exception, has some particular influence or efficacy to corrupt us. These things that are most innocent and harmless in their own nature, even those that are most useful and necessary, the business, the recreations, the riches, the pleasures, the honours, the company, and society of this world, may become the causes, or at least the instruments and occasions, of sinning to those who do not use them with caution and circumspection. While we live in a corrupt and degenerate world, we are treading upon hostile ground. A thousand dangers every where threaten us. A thousand snares are every where laid for us. We ought therefore to be continually looking around, lest we fall into the gins and traps which are planted upon every pleasure and every occupation to ensnare us. What prudence and circumspection, what diligence and application, must we not exert to avert so many dangers, and to overcome so many obstacles?

But the greatness of these difficulties will appear to us in a light still stronger, if we consider our own weakness and inability. How easily may we be overcome, and how little power have we to resist these potent adversaries? This is true, not only with respect to unregenerated sinners, who are slaves to Satan, but it is likewise applicable to the truly godly, whose complaints of their own insufficiency are frequently to be met with in the scripture: "Though the spirit be willing, we
" are told, the flesh is weak." "The flesh lusteth a-

“gainst the spirit,” says the Apostle Paul, “and the
“spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the
“one to the other: so that we cannot do the things
“that we would do *.” The following is a saying of
the same apostle: “For I know, that in me (that is,
“in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is
“present with me; but how to perform that which is
“good, I find not. For the good that I would, I do
“not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.
“I find then a law, that when I would do good, evil is
“present with me. For I delight in the law of God,
“after the inward man. But I see another law in my
“members, warring against the law of my mind, and
“bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is
“in my members †.” Now, when we lay all these con-
siderations together, do they not join their united force
to convince us of the necessity of diligence and applica-
tion in an affair of so much moment as the salvation of
our souls?

In order to make you yet more sensible of these
things, I shall illustrate what I have been saying by a si-
mle taken from temporal things. The case of a good
man carrying on a war against the enemies of his soul,
may be fitly enough represented by that of the governor
of a besieged city. But in order to make this comparison
answer our purpose better, let us add to it a few cir-
cumstances that have a resemblance to the case in hand.
Let us imagine, that the enemy who has laid siege to the
city is equally bold, enterprising, and obstinate; that he
is provided with every thing necessary for a vigorous at-
tack, faithful soldiers, proper ammunition, and all the
engines of war. Let us suppose, on the other hand,
that the place to be defended has many inconveniencies;
that the natural situation of it is none of the best; that
the garrison is but weak; that many of the inhabitants
are treacherous, and ready, upon the most trifling oc-
casion, to revolt, and hold a secret correspondence with
the foe. Let us suppose also, that the governor is ig-
norant of none of these things; that he knows, besides,

* Gal. v. 17.

† Rom. vii. 18.

his safety depends on his holding out; that as he shall be assisted and supported, if he do his duty, so he is altogether lost and undone, if, through negligence, he suffer himself to be conquered. These circumstances being supposed, what should we think of the governor, upon whose diligence the security of this place depended, if he grew remiss, indulged himself in sloth, and allowed himself his ordinary diversions and recreations? If he suffered a moment of his time to be lost without doing something to purpose, if there was any thing of the smallest consequence which he omitted, I question not but every one of us, upon hearing such a case proposed, would be ready to condemn his folly and stupidity. But if we reflect for a moment, we will find this case to be precisely our own. Our precious and immortal souls, whose interests should always lie nearest our hearts, are places which the devil, our grand enemy, has laid siege to with all his might. We have no reason to doubt of the power, the vigilance, or the obstinacy, of this indefatigable foe. All the infernal hosts are under his command; and the greatest number of men are likewise his servants. As he has a thousand avenues by which he may approach our souls, and a thousand engines to play upon them; so he fails not to make the best use of all these advantages. When open force would not be the most proper method, he knows how to circumvent us by cunning stratagems. When a temptation would be too gross were it nakedly proposed, he can gild it over with the fairest and most deceitful colours. And, which is worst of all, we have enemies within our bosoms. Our own hearts are deceitful and traiterous, and always ready to parley with the enemy. Now, when this is the condition of our souls, when we know that if Satan make himself master of our hearts, we are lost and undone; if in these circumstances, I say, we indulge ourselves in ease and indolence, what shall we say of the folly and madness of our conduct? A powerful enemy is every moment at our gates, ready to storm us with all the vigour and britkness which he is master of, and a party within us ready to yield and give up what we ought to esteem most precious and sacred; and, at this juncture, shall we

suffer ourselves to fall asleep, and dream away in idleness and inaction that valuable time which ought to be redeemed? In the former case, every one would be ready to discern the folly and impudence of a governor situated as I have supposed; but in the latter, it is no longer folly, it is no longer imprudence, it is inconceivable madness.

To all that has been said upon this particular, we may add, that as religion is an affair which is attended with so many difficulties, all these difficulties are increased, and rendered more formidable, the more careless and indolent we grow; whereas, if we would exert ourselves with diligence and application, we would find them gradually diminishing and disappearing. And to this purpose are the words of Solomon: "The way of the slothful man is as an hedge of thorns; but the way of the righteous is made plain *." The more slothful we are, we will find things always growing worse and worse. Our corrupt lusts and vitious inclinations will be still striking deeper root, and gathering more and more strength in the soul. The heart of man is a soil which must be cultivated with care and pains, and prepared for piety and virtue; but if it be neglected, vices will grow wild, and spring up of themselves. It is much easier to take things in time, than to let them run on till the difficulties grow so formidable, as to make one despair of overcoming them. To make use of our former simile: Is it not much easier to keep off an enemy at a distance, than after we have allowed him, by our indolence and inactivity, to gain ground upon us, and take possession of some of our outworks? When once a soldier forgets his exercise, and has been long out of the use of fighting, he will find it a harder matter to wield his arms, than one who is always in the heat of action. Besides, a Christian who has already been at some pains, and made some advances in his religious course, if he afterwards begins to turn remiss and careless, thereby loses the fruit of his former labours, and doubles his work upon himself. A good man, in his

* Rev. xv. 19.

conflict with the corruptions of his own heart, is like one swimming against the current of a rapid and impetuous river, who cannot repose himself a moment on the water, without being carried down, and, consequently, adding to his labour, and increasing his fatigue.

4thly, Our work is not only great and difficult, but our time is short and uncertain: "My days," says Job, "are like a weaver's shuttle *." And the Psalmist, "Thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; mine age is as nothing before thee." Now, when we consider how great a work it is to mortify one lust, and that it is not one lust, but all, that we have to mortify, and then consider how short a time we have to be employed in this great and difficult work; how should this stir us up to exert our most vigorous efforts? This is not all: Our time is not only short, but likewise uncertain. The strongest and most healthful man among us knows not how near he may be to the grave. This is purposely left uncertain by God, that we may always be upon our guard, and be concerned every day to live as if it were our last. This consideration is frequently urged by our Saviour, "Watch therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come †." And he tells us, that if, upon a false report of his Lord's delaying his coming, a man begin to indulge himself in sloth, "the lord of that servant shall come on a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder." He illustrates this by the parable of the ten virgins ‡. The foolish virgins were resolved to have oil in their lamps, as well as the wise; but they were so negligent, that they did not provide it in due time; and behold their lord's coming surprised them unprepared; and they were shut out for want of due care and diligence: "Watch therefore," says he in the conclusion of the parable, "for ye know neither the day nor the hour when the Son of man cometh." Compare this with the foregoing considerations, and see what their united strength amounts to. Religion is a work that is great

* Job, vii. 6.

† Matth. xxiv. 42.

‡ Matth. xxv.

and important; it is difficult and hard to be performed; our strength for it is but small, and our time both short and uncertain. With what indefatigable diligence, then, with what unwearied endeavours, ought we to exert ourselves in this affair? Do not all these arguments conspire together with a force that is not to be resisted, in persuading us how strong obligations we are under to diligence and application?

5thly, In order to engage you to activity in these things that concern your eternal salvation, let us consider the interest which God and our blessed Redeemer take in it, and the diligence, if I may speak so, with which they have exerted themselves in it. To make us sensible of the concern which God expresses about our salvation, let us see how he delivers himself on this subject by the prophet: "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together*." Does the great God express such a concern for our happiness, and are we so negligent and careless about it ourselves? The many earnest and repeated calls that we meet with to this purpose in the scripture, expressed in such a manner as things that come from the bottom of the heart, is likewise an evidence of this: "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel†?" And again, "I earnestly protested unto your fathers, in the day that I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, even unto this day, rising early, and protesting, saying, Obey my voice‡." "Howbeit," says the same prophet, "I sent unto you all my servants the prophets, rising early and sending them, saying, O do not this abominable thing that I hate||!" Is God then so careful, so earnest, and so diligent, about this matter,

* Hosea, xi. 8.

† Jer. xi. 7.

‡ Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

§ Chap. xliv. 4.

and are we so negligent and careless about it ourselves?

6thly, How indefatigable are worldly men in gratifying their inordinate lusts and appetites? May we not every day see the covetous, the voluptuous, or the ambitious sinner, each unweariedly pursuing what he takes to be his interest? What pains will a covetous worldling bestow in order to scrape together the perishing riches of the earth? He rises early, and sits up late; he denies himself, not only the innocent enjoyments, but even the necessities of life, that he may thereby procure the sordid dross he so much doats on. With no less eagerness does the voluptuous man pursue his pleasures, and the ambitious man his honours and preferments. He carefully watches every opportunity to advance himself in the world. So that we have occasion every day to see that saying of our Saviour verified, "The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light*." If all that diligence and application, all that prudence and circumspection, that are used by them, in order to compass their worldly ends, were used in working out the salvation of their souls, they would soon be flourishing Christians. But should not their example have some influence upon us, who pretend to have the salvation of our souls at heart? Shall carnal and worldly men, who are only pursuing the momentary enjoyments of a transitory life, outstrip us in diligence, who are seeking after an inheritance which is uncorrupted, undefiled, and which fadeth not away? Shall they be more indefatigable in acquiring the deceitful trifles of a perishing world, than we are in endeavouring to obtain the solid and substantial welfare of our immortal souls? Shall the miser labour night and day for those uncertain riches, to which he will be compelled in so short a time to bid an eternal adieu, and shall we be so lazy and slothful in laying up to ourselves treasures, where neither moth nor rust can corrupt, and where no thieves can break through and steal? Shall the voluptuary spend his time, and waste his substance, in

* Luke, xvi. 8.

procuring his delusive enjoyments, and shall we be so sparing of our pains, in order to arrive at those rivers of pleasure which are at the right hand of God? Finally, shall the ambitious man so unweariedly court and solicit for the favour of an earthly monarch, while we are so indolent and indifferent about our being the favourites of the supreme being, and becoming, through Christ, kings and priests unto God his Father? Let us be prevailed upon, even by the example of wicked men, who exceed us so far in diligence and fervour. As our Saviour urged the example of the unjust steward to teach his disciples wisdom and prudence in the management of their spiritual interests; so we may be taught, by a plea of this kind, to exert ourselves with diligence and zeal. Surely we have greater reason to do so than the men of the world. We have nobler enjoyments to pursue after than they. This argument is handled by the Apostle Paul, when he says, "And every man that striveth for the mastery, is temperate in all things: Now, they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible *." The apostle is here recommending to the Corinthians diligence in running the Christian race, from the example of those who engaged in the games that were so frequent among the ancient Greeks. At these games there were several who contended in races, either on foot or in chariots. The reward, which was a crown or garland, was hung up at the goal, in order to animate the candidates by having it full in their view. Now, these crowns, which they so earnestly contended for, were made only of the withering leaves of olive, bays, or laurel; and therefore the apostle justly adds, "They do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible." If these ancient racers, for the sake of so fading and perishing a crown, were temperate in all things, i. e. were sparing in the use of meat and drink, to keep their bodies from being unwieldy for these violent exercises, what laborious diligence may not be expected from a Christian, who has such a glorious and incorruptible crown to contend for? It is likewise called a crown

* 1 Cor ix. 25.

of righteousness: "Henceforth there is laid up for me
 "a crown of righteousness*." It is called a crown of
 life: "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation;
 "for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of
 "life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love
 "him†." It is called a crown of glory: "And when
 "the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a
 "crown of glory that fadeth not away‡." In a word,
 it is such an exceeding and eternal weight of glory, as
 eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor heart conceived.
 And however great the difficulties may be that lie in the
 way of our Christian course, this may be sufficient to a-
 nimate us with life and vigour, whenever we begin to
 flag and languish. The consideration that it is heaven
 we are contending for, should rouse us. There is
 enough in this one word to put spurs to our diligence,
 and make us mount up as eagles. When the apostle
 saw the prize which was at the end of his Christian
 course, he forgot those things that were behind, and
 pressed forward with the utmost vehemence and ar-
 dour. In like manner, he represents the influence
 which this noble consideration had upon him and his
 contemporaries: "For this cause we faint not; but
 "though our outward man perish, yet the inward man
 "is renewed day by day||."

7thly, In order to urge this consideration a little far-
 ther, let us consider, that the more diligent we are in
 religion now, the greater and more glorious shall our
 reward be hereafter. Some divines have been of opi-
 nion, that we ought not to inquire with curiosity, whe-
 ther there will be different degrees of glory in the fu-
 ture state or not? and I should have heartily joined
 with them, if this had been merely a matter of specu-
 lation; but since inquiring into it may have a powerful
 influence on the practice, I do not think such a noble ar-
 gument and motive for diligence and fervour should be
 altogether overlooked. Besides, it seems to be so plain-
 ly revealed in scripture, that the mention of it need
 not be called indulging our curiosity, but only the using

* 2 Tim. iv. 8.

† 1 Pet. v. 4.

‡ James, i. 12.

|| 2 Cor. iv. 16.

an argument which the scripture very manifestly affords us. We are told in several places, that we shall be rewarded according to our works. This phrase does not mean that any works of ours are the meritorious ground of reward, but only denotes a certain proportion in the future glory, according to the diligence of the persons upon whom it is bestowed: "For we must all appear before the judgement-seat of Christ, that every man may receive the things done in the body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad *." So we are told in Revelations, "And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works †." And in the same book it is said, "Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his works shall be ‡." This doctrine will likewise appear, if we read the parable of the pounds §. It is likewise taught us in other passages of holy writ. The Prophet Daniel tells us, that "they who be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament **;" which imports a superior degree of glory to such as have been most useful in the world. Those who have been stars of the first magnitude in the church militant on earth, shall likewise be stars of the first magnitude in the church triumphant above. The Apostle Paul, when he exhorts the Corinthians to charity, urges them with this argument, "He that soweth sparingly, shall reap also sparingly; but he that soweth bountifully, shall reap also bountifully ††." The present life is our seed-time, and the future life is the harvest, when we shall reap what we have sowed. I might mention many other passages of scripture where this doctrine is implied; such as the following: "There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differeth from another star in

* 2 Cor. v. 10.

§ Luke, xix. 12.

† Rev. xx. 12.

** Dan. xii. 3.

† Chap. xxii. 12.

†† 2 Cor. ix. 6.

“glory; so also is the resurrection of the dead*.” We may also observe, what tends to confirm this opinion, that it evidently appears from scripture, that there will be different degrees of punishment among the damned in hell. Those who have sinned with an high hand, and who have been notorious offenders, will be punished with more severity than those who have not arrived at such a pitch of wickedness and impiety. Our Saviour tells us expressly, that it will be more tolerable, in the day of judgement, for Sodom and Gomorrah, than for those places where he had preached, and which would have this condemnation, “That light was come “into the world, but they loved darkness more than “light.” It is likewise plain, and indeed it is generally allowed, that there are different orders of those happy spirits who never fell. We read of thrones and dominions, principalities and powers, angels and archangels, which seem to imply, that some of these glorious beings are advanced to greater dignities, and higher honours, than others. Now, if we suppose that God is uniform in all his works, we are not to imagine, that the glorified saints alone shall all be equally happy. And indeed there is something absurd in conceiving, that the Apostle Paul, for example, who was so zealous and so diligent a servant of his Lord, should be advanced no higher in glory than those righteous which the scripture tells us “are but scarcely saved.”

I have insisted the longer in proving this point, because it affords us such a powerful motive to activity and diligence in religion. This argument is such as should influence even those who have got over the fear of God's wrath. For not only will those who have no diligence come short of salvation, not only is some degree of it necessary in order to everlasting life, but the greater our diligence, the higher our glory and happiness. If there be so many degrees of felicity in heaven, and if they are to be measured out to us according to our works, with what activity and vigour should we engage in the great work of religion, that so we may be advanced to higher thrones of glory, and be admitted to a more intimate

* 1 Cor xv. 41.

vision and fruition of God? It is the mark of a base and disingenuous spirit, to aim only at the lowest degrees of glory, and to be satisfied with barely escaping the torments threatened against impenitent sinners. This is a strong symptom that we are not endued with the excellent spirit which is peculiar to the sons of God, and that our religion proceeds from no higher motive than the fear of punishment; but if we had a true love to God, and such a desire as we ought to have for that glorious happiness, which consists in enjoying him, we would be still aspiring after higher and higher degrees of it, and bounding ourselves with nothing short of perfection. Now it is the hand of the diligent only that maketh rich; it is he that soweth bountifully who shall reap bountifully. What a glorious encouragement is this to bestir ourselves with all the vigour and activity we are capable of, when we are assured that the reward shall be so much the greater.

8thly, Let us likewise consider what advances in holiness have been made by others who have gone before us. When we contemplate the lives of some worthies who have already trod the path to heaven, and observe how faithful and patient, how active and zealous they have been, it may cover us with blushes for the small progress we have made, and rouse us from our sloth, to follow their noble example. Thus we find the apostle proposing the example of eminent saints as an argument for diligence: "And we desire, that ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience are now inheriting the promises*." In the same epistle †, he sets before us the noble examples of Old-Testament worthies, that by them we may be fired with an holy emulation, and exert ourselves with all our might to equal them. He thus concludes the subject: "Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and run with patience the race set before us ‡." When we consider how Enoch by faith walked with God, and

* Heb. vi. 12.

† Chap. 11.

‡ Heb. xii. 1.

how Moses spake with him face to face, what a spirit should this be to our diligence, who rarely enjoy such instances of his favour? When we consider the patience of Job, the piety of David and of Hezekiah, in short, when we consider all those eminent and worthy characters, who by faith "subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, and stopped the mouths of lions," how should this inflame our zeal, and inspire us, who are so far behind them, with the most vehement ardour? When we consider the diligence and zeal of the Apostle Paul, who, even in comparison with the faithful ministers of Christ in these truly primitive ages, was, as he himself tells us, in labour more abundant; when we consider what fatigues he cheerfully endured, how he wished to spend and be spent in the service of Christ, and in the cause of the gospel, should it not have some influence upon us in quickening our diligence? When we hear of the courage and intrepidity of those brave martyrs, whom all the cruel engines of torture could not overcome; when we run over in our minds these noble examples of faith and patience, how justly may we be ashamed of our indolence? Do not our souls burn with emulation at the remembrance of their virtues? Shall we suffer ourselves to be so far behind, and to be so much outdone, by those who had no other assistance but what is likewise offered unto us? Under this particular I might likewise mention the example of our blessed Saviour, who counted it his meat and his drink to do the will of his heavenly Father, and who went about continually doing good. But having formerly spoke of the diligence of Christ in the work of our salvation, I shall not insist upon it any farther at present.

Thus, my brethren, you see how many arguments conspire together in engaging us to the most unwearied diligence in religion. And indeed the reasonableness, yea, the absolute necessity, of diligence, and the folly and danger of negligence, in an affair of such importance, is so great, that it may justly be matter of surprise, that there is one person who has heard of salvation who does not apply himself with all his might to a religious course of life. And yet such a person is ex-

ceeding rare. The greatest part of mankind scarcely pretend even to the appearance and shadow of religion; and some who make the highest pretences, only use it to cover the abominable lusts which they secretly cherish in their hypocritical hearts. Even such as are truly concerned for their immortal souls, and are fairly entered on a religious course of life, generally pursue it with langour and indifference. How much are even these persons overcome by negligence and sloth? and where is the man who is sincerely assiduous and diligent in the practice of his duty? Would it not be of importance to inquire,

III. INTO the causes why such a character is so rare, that by this means we may be taught to avoid them?

1st, It is very plain, that one great source of negligence in religion, is want of faith. We in reality do not believe the great truths of the gospel, whatever we may pretend to, if our lives are not more suitable to them than those of the generality of mankind. We either do not believe them at all, or the assent we give to them is not so firm as it ought to be, and therefore has not that influence on our practice which it ought to have. Let us suppose a man to be firmly persuaded of the following truths: That in a short time, how short he knows not, he is to die; that this death will land him in an unchangeable state, either of eternal happiness or eternal misery; that now is the only time to secure the one or the other of these states to himself; that the happiness which is offered infinitely exceeds his most aspiring wishes; that the punishment which is threatened comprehends all the torments his imagination can conceive; — I say, let us suppose a man as firmly persuaded of these truths as he is of his own existence, Can we think, that such a man would have any thing so much at heart as the salvation of his soul, and that he would not apply himself to every thing which could contribute towards the success of that great design? Is it possible he could act with indifference in a matter where he knows his most important interests are concerned? If a man was told, that his house was on fire, and that if help was not speedily

brought; his whole substance would be destroyed; and if we saw him still go on with some trifling affair, would we not immediately conclude, that he thought himself imposed upon, and that the intelligence was false?

I know the generality of careless Christians will think it is doing them injustice to rank them with Atheists and Infidels. It may perhaps be pretended, that they do not misbelieve these great truths, but only that they do not think upon them so much as they ought to do; and that this is the true reason why they have so little influence on their practice. To this the answer is easy: It is true, indeed, they do not think upon them; but then the reason why they do not, is because they disbelieve them: for if they were firmly persuaded of them, they would be the subject of their thoughts, till they had made the deepest impression upon their minds. It is possible, indeed, that a truth which a man firmly believes may escape his memory, if it be of little importance; but tell him a truth which touches him most sensibly, and in which his all is deeply concerned, and if he believes it to be true, it is impossible he can cease to think of it. To make use of our former simile: If a man was told by credible persons, that his house was on fire, would he give this as a reason why he did not call for help, that it had slipped out of his mind? Or suppose a man knew well enough that fire would burn him if he touched it, would we not think him mad, if he should thrust his hand into it, and tell us, that he was not adverting to the power which the fire had of burning him? It is impossible a man can forget such truths as these. He must call them to mind on every proper occasion, if he really believes them. Unbelief, therefore, is at the root of all our negligence in religion. Indeed it must be owned, that there is a dreg of unbelief even in the hearts of God's people themselves. In proportion as this principle prevails, are they negligent and slothful in those things that belong to their eternal peace. And therefore I would earnestly recommend it to every one of you, that you would labour to have a firm and deep persuasion of all the important truths of the gospel upon your own minds.

There are many different degrees of persuasion, which, according as they are weak or strong, have a different influence on the conduct. If a merchant was told by a person, on whose credit he would not altogether depend, that there was a great quantity of gold in a very distant country, which he might easily procure, if he would send a ship to the place, it is probable he would not put himself to any expence upon such uncertain information, although, at the same time, he did not directly disbelieve it, and knew not but it might be so. But if he were informed of this by one whose credit he was perfectly assured of, then it would begin to have some influence upon his mind, and he would send a ship upon the faith of it. In like manner, when people read the great truths of the gospel, if they truly believe them as things that are certain, they would undoubtedly act upon the faith of them, and live in some measure suitable to the impressions they naturally make. But does not all the faith of most people consist in this, that they do not contradict or deny the gospel? It may be true, for any thing they know. Alas! my brethren, if this be all the assent we give to the great doctrines of religion, it will never have a sufficient influence on our hearts and lives. If we are to judge the faith of men by their practice, we will find too much ground for the old complaint, "Who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?"

2dly, Another cause of negligence in religion, is love to the things of the world. Our heart and our affections are set upon temporal objects. Our zeal and our diligence is all bespoke and pre-engaged. We are already cumbered about so many things, that we forget the one thing needful. The great reason of this, I believe, is, that the things of this world are present; whereas the things of another world are future, and at a great distance. The things of this world are sensible; whereas the things of another world are spiritual: faith is only "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." And I doubt not but heaven and hell, being things of another world, and consequently things which are at a seeming distance, on this account

make but a slight impressiion upon our minds, and have but an inconsiderable influence upon our practice. On the other hand, the profits, the pleasures, and the honours of the world, being things that are seen and felt, make a deep impressiion upon us, and render us negligent about the salvation of our immortal souls. This worldly disposition we must labour to guard against, if we would apply with diligence to religion. We ought to consider, that though a benefit be future, this is no reason why we should abate our zeal in prosecuting it. All our pursuits, and almost all our actions, are for the sake of something future. In the beginning of life we apply, in order to become masters of some honest calling; but is not all our money and time laid out in prospect of something future, namely, a livelihood when we are of age? When a merchant sends a ship to sea, it is in hopes of gain at some distant time, although he cannot assure himself that his ship will certainly return. Here, then, lies the great difference between temporal things and things that are spiritual. In the affairs of our souls, we act upon a future prospect indeed; but we act with far more certainty than in the affairs of time: for the promise of God assures us of full success in the way of the gospel. Besides, in order to wean our affections more effectually from the things of this world, there are two remarkable differences between them, which we should always remember, and endeavour to rivet in our souls. The first regards the things themselves, the second the duration of them. Although the things of this world are present and sensible, yet how trifling and inconsiderable are they to an immortal soul! But a heaven and a hell, though they be at some distance, and God only knows how small the distance may be, are of such a nature as well deserve our most serious regard. As the torments of the damned infinitely exceed all the calamities of life, so there is no comparison between the happiness (falsely so called) which flows from carnal enjoyments, and the incomprehensible bliss that is reserved for saints in heaven. Again, although the things of this world are present, yet how short and uncertain is the enjoyment of them? We may have them to-day, and lose them to-morrow.

Could we even promise to ourselves the enjoyment of them during the longest term of human life, what is this in comparison of eternity? A heaven and a hell are things that are never to have an end. Now it is a plain rule of wisdom, to decline a present pleasure for one that is equal to it of longer continuance, or to submit to a present inconvenience, to prevent one that will be more lasting, or to obtain a more lasting good. But in the case we are now speaking of, when we consider, that the things of another world are not only infinitely more lasting than the things of this, but likewise infinitely greater in their nature, it should be sufficient, and more than sufficient, to balance the consideration of the one's being present and the other future. It should be sufficient to put spurs to our diligence, and make us exert all the vigour we are masters of.

3dly, The difficulties that are to be met with in a religious course of life, is another cause that prevents men from applying to it with ardour and resolution: "There is a lion without, says the slothful man, I shall be slain in the streets." He forms and entertains the most melancholy apprehensions of the dangers and hardships which the sincere practice of religion will expose him to; and these weaken his resolution, and make him give over all hopes of succeeding in an enterprise which he looks upon as desperate. [*Part of the Manuscript is wanting here.*]

THUS have I executed the plan by which I proposed to illustrate the first doctrine, viz. That a Christian, in the practice of religion, should not satisfy himself with faint and languid efforts, but should exert himself with the greatest diligence and application.

SERMON IX.

2 Peter, i. 10.

Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure : for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.

[Second Sermon on this text.]

I PROCEED now to the *second* doctrine I proposed to illustrate, viz. That we should not only endeavour to attain an interest in Christ, but that we should give ourselves no rest till we have arrived at a certainty and assurance of it.

IN discoursing upon this subject, I shall adopt the following method.

1st, I shall explain the nature of this privilege, and show you upon what it is founded ; 2^{dly}, I shall show you, that it is attainable in this life ; 3^{dly}, I shall offer some arguments to persuade you to be diligent in seeking after it.

I. I AM to explain the nature of this privilege, and show you upon what it is founded.

Affurance is the certain knowledge which a good man hath, that he is now in a state of favour and friendship with God, and that he shall afterwards be received into everlasting glory. It is founded upon the divine truth of the promises of salvation, the inward evidence

of those graces to which the promises are made, and "the testimony of the Spirit, witnessing with their spirits that they are the children of God."

I call it a certain knowledge, to distinguish it both from the vain presumption of secure sinners, and the conjectural hopes of weaker Christians. There are, no doubt, too many in the world, who fondly flatter themselves with a vain presumptuous imagination that they are in the favour of God, and will be admitted into heaven. But this is so far from being a certain knowledge, that it is either founded on gross mistakes, or flows from an indolent and careless temper of mind. Such persons either mistake the terms of salvation, or think they have performed the conditions of it when they have not, or give themselves no time to reflect upon the subject. There are some who mistake the terms of salvation. They conceive such notions of the mercy of God, as if he was to save us without our forsaking iniquity, provided only we have some faint wishes to be in his favour, and utter at times some dry complaint or confession of our sins. They trust in God's mercy, and think this is all that will be required of them. It is no wonder that where these mistakes prevail, carnal security should always accompany them. This, however, is far from being a certain knowledge of things that are thus but fondly imagined. This is crying, "Peace, peace, when there is no peace." Others, again, may have juster notions of the terms of salvation; but their self-conceit makes them imagine that they have performed the conditions thereof when they have not. It is natural for man to be prejudiced in his own favour, and to view his own actions in the most favourable light. On this account, there are many who look upon their faith, repentance, and obedience, which are false and spurious, as true and genuine. There are many likewise who are so deeply immersed in the cares and pleasures of the world, that the salvation of their souls is an object that gives them little concern. They are so wholly taken up with the things of this present life, that they spend their time in an unthinking security about a future state.

I have been thus particular in describing the several kinds of carnal security, that you may observe the difference between this and that solid assurance of an interest in Christ which good men alone can be possessed of. It is impossible to have a certain assurance of that which is not true; and therefore none are in possession of the privilege I am speaking of but good men alone; for none else can have the assurance that they are in a state of grace; because it is certain that none else are so. But although this be a privilege peculiar to those that are truly religious, yet it is not common to all such. I call it therefore a certain knowledge, to distinguish it likewise from the conjectural hopes of weaker Christians. There may be a well-grounded hope in a true believer, who yet has not so full an evidence of grace as amounts to an infallible assurance. There are many sincere Christians, who, on the one hand, have probable grounds for hoping the best; but, on the other, are too frequently sensible of something in their conduct that gives them reason to fear the worst. So that although they may sometimes feel the cheerful dawn of hope, yet still they are in a state of uncertainty, and cannot determine the matter to their entire satisfaction. But this assurance of which I am now speaking, and which every believer, by suitable diligence, may attain, is a sure and infallible knowledge, which leaves no room for doubt or hesitation. It is called by the apostle, "The full assurance of hope, an anchor of the soul both sure and stedfast *." This will appear by considering the grounds upon which it is founded. These are,

1st, The divine truth of the promises of salvation. There cannot be a surer basis for any thing than the veracity of God, because it is absolutely impossible he can deceive us. Whatever is founded upon this, therefore, must be attended with the highest degree of certainty. Now, a believer's assurance of God's favour is built upon this foundation. This the apostle tells us, in such terms as demonstrate that nothing can be

* Heb. vi. 11. 19.

For his own words, I refer you to Heb. vi. 16. &c. *2dly*, The inward evidence of those graces unto which the promises are made. The promises are made to faith: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house *." This is one infallible ground for assurance. They are made to holiness: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God †." Here, then, is another ground of assurance. That believers may be enabled certainly to discover those graces in themselves, is plain, because, *3dly*, Another ground upon which assurance is founded, is the testimony of the Spirit, witnessing with their spirits that they are the children of God. The Holy Ghost clears up the evidences, and discovers the graces, in the soul of a good man, as to make it appear, with the highest certainty, that he is a child of God.

II. I AM to show, That such an assurance is attainable in this life. This will appear from the following considerations.

1st, It is plain from the nature of the thing itself. A man may reason the same way in the spiritual life as in the natural life. In the natural life, we not only think and understand, but we are conscious that we do so. In the spiritual life, too, there are not only direct, but likewise reflex acts of the soul. When a man, therefore, exerts any spiritual grace, what should hinder him to feel that he does so? "He that believeth," says the Apostle John, "on the Son of God, hath the witness in himself ‡." He need but look into his own breast, and observe his own conduct, to be sensible of the state of his soul. There is undoubtedly a wide difference between the dispositions, sentiments, and actions of a regenerate person, and those of a natural man, who is yet under the dominion of sin, and the slavery of his lusts: "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. Old things are passed away, all things are

* Acts, xvi. 31.

† Matth. v. 8.

‡ 1 John, v. 10.

“become new *.” It is plain, that the scripture has marked this difference very distinctly; why then may we not observe, whether our own actions, temper, and dispositions, correspond with the one or the other of these characters? And what should hinder us to conclude with infallible certainty, whether we are the children of God or not? We find Paul speaking as if he wondered how Christians could be ignorant of their state: Either Christ must be in you, he says, or you must be reprobates †. These are two very different states; they are quite opposite to one another: how is it then that you are ignorant which of them you are in? From this we may conclude, that it is so far from being impossible for a believer to attain assurance, that it is rather a wonder how such persons come to want it.

2dly, We have many instances, in scripture, of saints who have attained this noble privilege. Often do we find David asserting with confidence his interest in God, and his sincerity in his covenant. In the 26th psalm, he appeals to God himself, who he knew would bear witness to his sincerity: “Judge me, O Lord,” he says, “for I have walked in mine integrity; I have trusted also in the Lord; therefore I shall not slide. Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try my reins, and my heart; for thy loving-kindness is before mine eyes.” And again, “When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek ‡.” By the whole strain of the Song of Solomon, it appears, that the spouse was certainly assured of her interest in him who is represented under the character of the bridegroom. We likewise find the New-Testament saints conscious of their faith, and of the sincerity of their good dispositions. The father of the lunatic asserts the truth of his faith, though he laments the weakness of it: “I believe, Lord; help thou mine unbelief ¶.” How often do we find the Apostle Paul exulting in the triumphs of an assured Christian: “I am persuaded,” says he, “that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, &c.

* 2 Cor. v. 17.
 ¶ Mark, ix. 24.

† 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

‡ Ps. xxvii. 8.

“ shall be able to separate us from the love of God
 “ which is in Jesus Christ our Lord *.” From these
 instances, then, we see that this glorious privilege is
 attainable in the present life. Nor can it be here ob-
 jected, that this was owing to some immediate and ex-
 traordinary revelation which God was pleased to bestow
 upon these primitive saints; for it is plain, that they at-
 tained it in an ordinary way, by reflecting upon their
 own conduct, and on the sincerity of their religion.
 This is the way in which David reasons. He was con-
 scious to himself, that he had walked in his integrity;
 and therefore he concludes, that he should not slide.
 The Apostle Paul, too, finding he had fought the good
 fight, concludes, that there is a crown of righteousness
 laid up for him. Now, if these eminent saints attained
 such a full assurance even in this life, by the use of or-
 dinary means, what should hinder us from the same
 attainment, if we pursue it with the same diligence? But
 that this privilege was not peculiar to them, will appear,
 if we consider,

3dly, That all Christians are commanded in scripture
 to seek after it. The words in my text are delivered
 by way of exhortation, or apostolical precept. In the
 same manner, says the Apostle Paul, “ Examine your-
 “ selves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own
 “ selves: know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus
 “ Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates †?” Now,
 these commands being directed to all Christians in gene-
 ral, it is plain, that the enjoyment of this happy privi-
 lege is equally attainable by all who are diligent in quest
 of it. If we should suppose, that it is impossible for a
 good man to discover whether he be in a state of grace
 or not, then what signify these commands and exhor-
 tations? If such were the case, would not all the
 trouble which one should give himself in this matter be
 lost labour? And do we think the apostle would exhort
 us to labour in vain, and engage us in a pursuit which
 could never be attended with success?

4thly, The inspired writers have left upon record ma-
 ny characters, by which, when we apply them to our-

* Rom. viii. 38.

† 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

selves, we may discover whether or not we are in a state of grace; such as the following: "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another *." And again, "Whosoever doth not righteousness, is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother †." And the apostle tells us himself, that one great design of his writing this epistle was, that Christians may know how to attain the assurance of their happy state: "These things have I written to you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life." Now, if assurance be a privilege that is not attainable in this life, to what purpose are all these marks and characters of a state of grace? For what end are such passages of scripture left upon record? Undoubtedly they are not written in vain. We must therefore conclude, that assurance is attainable through their assistance.

Lastly, If the assurance of our interest in Christ were not attainable in this life, what solid ground would a believer have for spiritual joy? An holy gladness of heart is not only allowed us in this world, but it is a duty incumbent upon the children of God. Now, if a good man were always in the dark about his spiritual state, how could he give obedience to such commands as these: "Rejoice evermore." "Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice." No wise man can rejoice on account of any happiness which they are not in sure possession of; but Christians are called to rejoice on account of spiritual blessings; and therefore they must certainly have the assurance of them.

III. I PROCEED now to what was my principal design, namely, To offer you some arguments and motives to excite your diligence in endeavouring to arrive at this valuable and glorious privilege.

Indeed, my brethren, one would be apt to think, that there was no necessity for such an employment, if the general practice of the world did not convince us of the contrary. It has been shown, that the assurance of eternal happiness is attainable in this life; and would

* John, xiii. 35.

† 1 John, iii. 10.

any body imagine that Christians, if they duly consulted their interest, would need to be pressed and urged to seek after it? You have already seen, that the positive command of God obliges us to this duty: and although there was nothing else to move us to it, is not the authority of God sufficient to make us exert ourselves? But so far is this from being the only motive, that although there had been no such precept in the Bible, our own interest, if we consulted it properly, would be sufficient for this purpose. This is a privilege of such a noble kind, that the attainment of it is a recompence for all the pains it can possibly cost us; and the want of it is an evil which I am astonished is so easily borne. To be uncertain whether we shall be eternally happy or eternally miserable, is enough, one would think, to distract any rational creature who knows the meaning of heaven or hell; and yet how easily do the generality of men live under such an uncertainty? Although their own interest is deeply concerned, yet it is plain they need to be pressed and urged to their duty in this particular. Now, in order to persuade you to be diligent in securing this important point, I shall suggest a few considerations, which to me appear to be powerful motives.

We may be induced to give all diligence to make our calling and election sure, *1st*, On account of the pleasure and spiritual delight with which this noble privilege is accompanied; *2dly*, On account of the happy influence it has upon our growth in sanctification.

3dly, We may be persuaded to exert ourselves in order to attain a state of assurance, if we would consider, that it fills the heart with the sweetest pleasure and satisfaction. It is indeed to be regretted, that so few of us have felt the force of this argument by experience. But if we reflect on the experience of those who have possessed this glorious privilege, or upon the nature of the thing itself, it will appear, that such a state is attended with the most ravishing joy and transporting pleasure, such a joy and pleasure as infinitely exceed the highest sensual gratifications: "Thou hast put gladness in my heart," says the Psalmist, "more than in the time

“when their corn and wine increased *.” This gladness is what Solomon calls “a continual feast.” Everlasting joy is upon the heads of those happy persons, and sorrow and sighing flies away. This is a delight so ineffable, that those who have felt it in its greatest ecstasy are unable to describe it, but declare it altogether inconceivable. It is called, “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding †.” “In whom,” says the apostle, “though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable ‡.”

Thus we see how these favourites of Heaven, who have been blessed with this glorious privilege, express themselves. If we consult the nature of the thing, too, it will appear, that nothing can afford us so ravishing a pleasure; for nothing can be more agreeable to that self-love which is essential to our constitution. It is natural for every rational being, and at the same time it is innocent, to desire and be pleased with the prospect of happiness. Now, this privilege which we are speaking of consists in the certain assurance, that we shall one day be put in possession of the most exquisite bliss, and placed beyond the reach or apprehension of misery. Besides, nothing can be more agreeable, than to know that we are beloved by the persons whom we love most ardently. Now, it is a principal part of the Christian's character, that God and his Redeemer are the great objects of his most elevated affections. It must therefore afford him the most touching sensations of pleasure to know that he is loved by them again. But the assurance we are speaking of, is the assurance of God's love, the assurance that we are the objects of the dying love of our Redeemer; and therefore it must touch our souls with the most delightful sensations. Finally, the sweetest of all our passions is that of joy, especially when it flows from the possession of what is truly good. Now, it is plain, that the most sincere and exalted joy must be the necessary fruit of this comfortable privilege; for is it possible that one who is assured of the love of God, who is assured of a Redeemer's grace, and who is assured of an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and

* Ps. iv. 7.

† Phil. iv. 7.

‡ 1 Pet. i. 8.

that fadeth not away, is it possible, that one can be assured of these things without being filled with joy unspeakable and full of glory? This must inspire his soul with such a perpetual peace and tranquillity, as none but he can possibly feel or express. It must add a new chearfulness to all his comforts, and give an additional transport to all his joys. But in order to have a distincter notion of the happiness which it must yield to one who is possessed of it, let us consider such a person in these different circumstances: 1. In retirement; 2. In the performance of his duties; 3. In affliction; 4. In death.

1. Let us consider him in his solitary retirement. When he steps aside from the business of the world, and converses with himself in his secret meditations, he has a pleasurable taste of such refined joys, and such refreshing comforts, as the rest of the world cannot possibly conceive: "He delights himself in the Lord, who gives him the desires of his heart." "His meditation of God is sweet, and he finds himself glad in the Lord." "In the multitude of my thoughts within me," says the Psalmist, "thy comforts delight my soul." If his meditations run on God, how refreshing and comfortable must they be! All the excellencies of that amiable being must be doubly amiable to him who can look upon him as his reconciled Father. The more he finds in the Deity, it will enlarge his own treasure; for he can look upon all the attributes of God as making up his glorious and everlasting portion. He can look upon the eternity of God as the date of his happiness, the omnipotence of God as his guard, the faithfulness of God as his security, the wisdom of God as his counsellor, in short, the all-sufficiency of God as the lot of his inheritance. When an unregenerated sinner contemplates the perfections of his Creator, he may conceive of him as a being full of majesty and greatness; but he cannot view him in the same amiable light with the assured believer. When he beholds him armed with vengeance and fury, there are none of his attributes but may strike terror into his soul. With what different sentiments does an assured believer meditate on God! "Whom have I in heaven but thee?" he

says, "there is none upon the earth whom I desire besides thee *."

Again, if an assured Christian, in his retirement, turn his eye inward, and think upon his own heart, though he will still meet with abundant matter for humiliation, yet even there his meditations may be sweet. He sees that his sins, however great and numerous, are all washed away by the blood of his Redeemer. He sees a work of sanctification fairly begun; and he knows, that God, who has begun a good work in him, will in due time perfect what he has begun, that in the day of Christ he may be presented, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing. If the glory and felicity of a future state be the subject of his meditation, how delightful must it be to him, who knows that all the fullness of joy which is in God's presence, and the ineffable pleasures which are at his right hand, are reserved for him? With what rapture will he look upon heaven as his own, and wander through the blissful ages of an endless eternity!

On the other hand, how contemptible is a wicked man in his retirement? His mind is incapable of elevation. He may shine, perhaps, in a company where the conversation turns upon the pitiful trifles of the present world; but leave him to converse with himself, leave him to commune with his own heart, and there he will find himself torn to pieces by tumultuous and contending passions. If he venture to stretch his thoughts towards the other world, with what a dismal prospect is he presented? The awful terrors of a future judgement, the dreadful torments of a wretched eternity, conspire to startle his soul, and disturb his meditations. Accordingly we find, that of all others, wicked men hate themselves most for companions. Soliloquies and heart-discoveries are a torment to them; they have no relish for that advice of the Psalmist, "Commune with your own heart, and be still †." I only mention this that the contrast may heighten our notions of the happiness of an assured believer in his religious retirement. A person of this happy character may ascend

* Ps. lxxiii. 25.

† Ps. iv. 4.

with joy the mount of meditation, and run over some of those glorious prospects which are so pregnant with delight. From thence he may look down with contempt on all the lean pleasures, and empty enjoyments, in which the worldly man delights. He may pity the deluded mortals who "spend their money for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which profiteth not." Is not this an object worth the seeking after? Is not assurance a privilege for which we ought to contend with zeal?

2. Let us consider the assured Christian in the performance of holy duties. When he finds himself in the assembly of the saints, engaged either in the public or private exercises of worship, he is filled with the most ravishing and ecstatic pleasure. When he goes to the altar of God, he goes to a God whom he knows to be his exceeding joy. When his prayer ascends like incense, he knows that he is addressing himself to a kind Father, who is both able and willing to help him: he draws near, therefore, with a true heart, in the full assurance of grace, with confidence and boldness. In the ordinances of God's immediate appointment, he holds the sweetest communion with his Creator and Redeemer. His fellowship is with the Father, and his Son Jesus Christ. How well does the spouse describe the transport she felt upon such occasions? "I sat me down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste: he brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love *." When such is the case of an assured believer, is it any wonder that he should look upon the tabernacles of God as lovely, and reckon a day in his courts above a thousand elsewhere? Should not this be a powerful motive to all who have any regard for their souls to seek after this glorious privilege?

3. Let us consider the assured Christian in his afflictions, and under the pressure of outward calamities. We will find that the glory of this invaluable privilege shines through the deepest shades, and appears even with a brighter lustre under the darkest clouds.

* Song of Solomon, ii. 3.

If he still retain this comfortable friend in his bosom, it will be sufficient to brighten the most gloomy scenes, and enliven what would otherwise be his dullest hours. The ungodly man in distress, must of all creatures be the most wretched and forlorn. He feels the whole pressure of a present calamity, without being relieved with the remembrance of any thing that is past, or the prospect of any thing to come. But a good man, who has the assurance of the love of God, may smile at the smartest stings of external affliction. Reflections occur to his mind that are sufficient to blunt the edge of the severest calamity. He sees an end of all his troubles, and knows that in a short time he will be possessed of happiness that can neither be disturbed nor suspended. He can say, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" "and why art thou disquieted within me? Put thy trust in God." The future happiness which he has the assurance of, is so efficacious, as to make the greatest mountain of temporal affliction dwindle into inconsiderable mole-hills, yea, vanish into nothing at all: "For I reckon," says the Apostle Paul, "that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us *." What was it that made the martyrs suffer with so much constancy, and die in ecstasies of joy? Was it not the glorious assurance of eternal happiness? This made them despise the momentary pain that can be inflicted by men, who only kill the body, as nothing in comparison of that glory which they had so near a prospect of: "Ye took joyfully the spoiling of your goods; knowing," says the apostle, "that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance †." For my own part, I think it is much easier to conceive how an assured Christian can be content in the midst of torture, than how a sinner can be so in the midst of unlawful pleasure. A child of God, who suffers for the sake of a good conscience, endures some bodily pains for a moment; but, at the same time, he knows that he is beloved by God, who is actually advancing him to a perfect and eternal felicity. What proportion is there be-

* Rom. viii. 18.

† Heb. x. 34.

tween the evil he suffers and the good which he enjoys? How natural is it to slight and forget the former, and to rest on the latter? Is it not reasonable for one in such circumstances to abandon himself to joy and rapture? On the other hand, what comfort can a wicked man feel in the enjoyment of pleasures which in their own nature are so trifling, and which, trifling as they are, he knows he must lose in a very short time. He knows, or at least he ought to know, that God Almighty abhors him, and hath eternal torments in store for him in the other world. Now, when such is the case, how is it possible he can enjoy himself with any pleasure or satisfaction?

Thus you see an assured Christian can easily triumph over all his temporal afflictions. But this is not all. He has other considerations that can easily disarm affliction of any power to discompose or hurt him. He knows, that, being the object of God's everlasting love, nothing that comes from so kind a father can possibly tend to his disadvantage, but must be designed for his good. He knows, that though he himself be so short-sighted as not to discern this tendency; yet he can rely upon the word of God, who has assured him that the matter is so. There is one text of scripture which is sufficient to set the mind of a Christian at ease under every calamity. It is this: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God *." If a man has the solid assurance, that he has a right to apply this passage to himself, what in all the world can give him the least disquietude? Although no affliction seems for the present to be joyous, but rather grievous; yet he knows that God dealeth with him as with a son; and that it shall either tend to his advantage here, or yield him the peaceable fruits of righteousness hereafter. So that good men, even when they appear sorrowful in their outward circumstances, have good reason to be always rejoicing. Accordingly we find them, so far from sinking under temporal calamities, that they are often thankful for them: "It is good for me," says the Psalmist, "that

* Rom. viii. 28.

“ I have been afflicted *.” “ I know that thy
 “ judgements are right, and that in faithfulness thou
 “ hast afflicted me †.” “ Being justified by faith,”
 says the Apostle Paul, “ we have peace with God,
 “ through our Lord Jesus Christ. We rejoice in hope
 “ of the glory of God; and not only so, but we glory in
 “ tribulation ‡.” What has an assured believer ground
 to be afraid of? The Lord is his light and his salvation,
 whom should he fear? The Lord is the strength of his
 life, of whom should he be afraid? If God be for
 him, who can be against him? One who can say, up-
 on as good ground as the Psalmist, “ God is my re-
 “ fuge,” may well infer, as he does, “ Therefore I will
 “ not be afraid, though the earth be removed, and tho’
 “ the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea ||.”
 Though all nature were loosening from her basis, though
 the world were wrapped in an universal conflagration,
 he might survey it with the most undisturbed tranquil-
 lity, as that which could not impair his felicity. For
 as long as he dwells in the secret place of the Most High,
 as long as he abides under the shadow of the Almighty,
 it is impossible for any thing to break his peace, or
 disturb the serenity of his mind. However dismal at
 first sight the aspect of things may be, however dark
 and gloomy their external appearance, he sees through
 the disguise, and faith opens up a bright and glorious
 prospect. Besides, he knows that at farthest a few mo-
 ments more will land him in happier climes, and on a
 safer shore, where all his losses shall be greatly overpaid.
 This leads to the last view in which I proposed to con-
 sider him.

4. Let us view the Christian in his last moments,
 and we will find what a comfortable thing it is to have
 the assurance of God’s love at such a season. When
 the time of our dissolution approaches, and death is
 setting all his terrors in array against us, when we must
 bid an eternal adieu to the world, and enter on a new
 state of existence, how comfortable must it be to have
 the well-grounded assurance, that “ after our earthly
 “ house is dissolved, we have a building of God, an

* Ps cxix. 71.

† Vers. 75.

‡ Rom. v. 1.

|| Ps. xlvii. 1.

“house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens *.” Death must indeed be terrible to an unprepared sinner, nay, even to all such as have no certainty about their future state. Now, none of us can tell how soon the hour of death may arrive. Some of his ministers, perhaps, are already on the wing to visit us; and if we be not fortified against his approaches, by the solid assurance of God’s love, how will we be able to meet so grim a messenger? Grim and ghastly he will be to us, who know not but he is sent to drag us to the dismal regions of howling and despair. How torturing even the thought, that we are not sure but this may be the case! How can that mind possess itself in peace, where the smallest room is left for so tormenting a suspicion? But if the distant prospect of death be so tormenting to one who is not prepared for it by this noble privilege, how much more formidable will its near approaches be, when the soul is just upon the wing, and, as it were, within sight of eternity, and at the same time knows not but it may be about to enter on these awful torments of the damned, which are never to have an end, nor even an intermission? With what horrid apprehensions must one in these circumstances enter the dark vale? But, on the other hand, with what boldness and intrepidity, nay, with what cheerfulness and alacrity, may the assured Christian meet the approaches of death? The king of terrors will be disarmed of his sting, and stripped of all his formidable array. The noble privilege of assurance will embolden a believer to triumph over death, as having no power to hurt him. “O death,” says the apostle, “where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” Nay, he will not only be able to triumph over him, but he may welcome him as a grateful messenger; as one sent by his bountiful benefactor to bring him into his presence, and crown him with honour and glory. “For we that are in this tabernacle,” says the apostle, “do groan, being burdened; not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up

* 2 Cor. v. 1.

† 1 Cor. xv. 55.

“ of life *.” With what joyful raptures might such a one take his leave of sublunary vanities, with the solid assurance of mounting up into paradise? Instead of the dismal doubts and perplexing uncertainties of weaker Christians, with what a ravishing prospect does the approach of death present him? The transporting joys of a future state, the rich and everlasting pleasures of his heavenly inheritance, rise before his imagination in so near a view, that he already tastes the raptures of immortality. The rivers of pleasure which are at God’s right hand begin to flow into his soul, bearing down every thing before them, and leaving him scarcely capable of any other sensation.

Thus I have endeavoured, by a few instances, to lay before you the rapture and delight with which the assurance of God’s love is attended. And when we reflect on the glorious circumstances of an assured believer, should they not all conspire with united force to excite and stir us up to exert ourselves with all the fervour of which we are capable? To enforce this argument a little farther, I proceed.

2dly, To consider another advantage of assurance, viz. the happy influence it has upon our growth in sanctification.

It is a false and ill-grounded notion of the Papists and others, who are apt to conceive that assurance may have an hurtful influence on the holiness of a Christian’s life, by disposing him to be careless and negligent, as if he had already done enough, and were beyond all fear of danger. This I acknowledge is the natural effect of carnal security; but the distinguishing mark and characteristic of real assurance is, that it is the most powerful incentive to holiness and practical religion. Now, in order to illustrate this, I shall show you, *1st*, That assurance, from the very nature of the thing, must have a powerful influence on sanctification; *2dly*, I shall give you some instances of graces that are made to flourish by the means of assurance.

1. It is plain, that assurance must have a noble influence on the sanctification of our lives; because it has

a native tendency to take off our hearts from the things of this world, to spiritualize our minds, and place our affections on things above. The chief reason why an holy and spiritual life is so rare, is because the hearts of most men are glewed to the world, and present things are apt to make the deepest impresson upon our minds. The pleasures, the profits, and the honours of this world, ingross our affections, and carry us off from attending to our eternal interests. But a believer, who has the solid assurance of everlasting glory, is so filled with the ravishing prospect, that he looks down with contempt on the wretched enjoyments of the present life. He is so sure of an infinite weight of glory, that there is nothing here which he can look upon as deserving his attention. He looks not at the things which are seen and temporal, but at the things which are unseen and eternal. Where-ever a man's treasure is, there will his heart be also. Now the assured Christian knows that his treasure is in heaven, and therefore his conversation will likewise be in heaven. None of the transitory vanities of the present will be able to make any impresson upon him, as long as he has so sure a prospect of the solid happiness of a future life. Besides, he feels so much true pleasure and satisfaction in the assurance of God's love, that he cannot be supposed to give himself up to the pursuit of those objects which in his eyes are so worthless and contemptible.

2. The influence which assurance would have upon the sanctification of our lives, will appear to be very great, if we consider that it will make us more sensible of the obligations of gratitude which they are under to God. The assured believer knows that he has been the object of God's everlasting love, who has not withheld his son, his only son, but delivered him up for his offences. He is sensible how much he owes to the grace of God, for calling him from darkness into his marvellous light; therefore he will be ready to say, shall such a man as I sin? shall I, who have received so many favours from God, rebel against my bountiful benefactor? The thoughts of these rich and valuable blessings, which he finds himself in the possession or the certain prospect of, will give him a horror at offending

that God, who is the author of all these blessings. So that an assured believer is above all men whatever fortified against temptation. To illustrate this a little farther, I shall, 2^{dly}, give you a few instances of those graces which assurance contributes to improve.

1. Assurance will contribute very much to strengthen the faith of a believer. He not only knows, but feels the Christian religion to be true. He feels the mighty change which it hath wrought on his own heart. The objections of infidels can make no impression upon him; for he has only to look into his own heart for a confutation of them. Besides, it is a strong encouragement for him to rely on Christ for the rest of his salvation, when he finds, that he has performed so considerable a part of it already.

2. Assurance will also contribute to the exercise of repentance in a believer. When he considers, that Christ is his kindest benefactor, how doth his heart melt with tenderness at having offended him? When he looks back to the bitter sufferings of his Lord and Saviour, and calls to mind what part his sins bore in the bloody scene, the thought will be as a sword piercing his bones. Thus it is prophesied by Zechariah, That when believers should "look upon Christ as one whom they themselves had pierced, they should mourn as "one mourneth for an only son *."

3. Assurance will likewise strengthen and increase our love both to God and man, which is the great principle of obedience, and the fulfilling of the whole law. It must contribute to strengthen our love to God; for when we have such a full assurance of his regard for us, how can this fail to kindle a reciprocal flame of love towards him? "We loved him," says John, "because he first loved us." Love naturally begets love. And therefore those who are so firmly persuaded of God's amazing love, cannot fail to have their hearts full of gratitude and affection to him in their turn. It has likewise a tendency to increase love for our neighbour. How can a man be severe on his brother, who knows that God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven him? When we know that God has

* Zech. xiii. 10.

absolved us from our debt of ten thousand talents, can we go and take our brother by the throat for an hundred pence?

4. Assurance will very much contribute to keep up the exercise of prayer; for it gives a believer access with boldness and confidence to the throne of grace. Guilt is the only thing that abashes the soul, and makes it both ashamed and afraid to appear before God. There is nothing that tends more to blunt the edge of our confidence, and render us constipated, as it were, in our secret addresses to God, as a sense of our frequent rebellions and disobedience. We may observe in ourselves what slavish dejectedness of heart seizes on us when we come to God in duty after we have wronged him by any known sin. "If I regard iniquity in my heart," says David, "the Lord will not hear me *." But, on the other hand, when our conscience is clear, and our peace with God secured, what pleasure and delight do we feel in the exercise of prayer? "Beloved," says the Apostle John, "if our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God." When we are sure of "having an high priest over the house of God, who has fully satisfied for our sins, then we may draw near in the full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience." —

* Ps. lxi. 18.

[The Editors are sorry that the conclusion of this Sermon is irrecoverably lost. However, the Gentlemen who made the selection having pitched upon it as a discourse of merit, and one which might have an useful and edifying tendency, they have ventured to give it to the public even in its present mutilated state.]

F I N I S.



absolved us from our debt of ten thousand talents, can we go and take our brother by the throat for an hundred pence? Assurance will very much contribute to keep up the exercise of prayer; for it gives a believer access with boldness and confidence to the throne of grace. God is the only thing that abates the soul, and makes it both ashamed and afraid to appear before God. There is nothing that tends more to blunt the edge of our confidence, and renders us confident, as it were, in our better address to God, as a sense of our frequent rebellions and disobedience. We may observe in ourselves what faithful discharges of heart pains on matters we come to God in duty after we have wronged him by any known sin. "If I regard iniquity in my heart," says David, "the Lord will not hear me." But on the other hand, when our confidence is clear, and our peace with God perfect, what pleasure and delight do we feel in the exercise of prayer? "Beloved," says the Apostle John, "if our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God." When we are full of "having in high prize over the house of God," who has truly finished for our sins, then we may draw near with confidence of faith, having "our hearts purified from all unbelief."

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